OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES

July 1955

35¢

NARKEETA
By
Evelyn Martin

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THE COWARD
By
James W. Power

*

I'll TELL MY BIG BROTHER
By
Ray Palmer

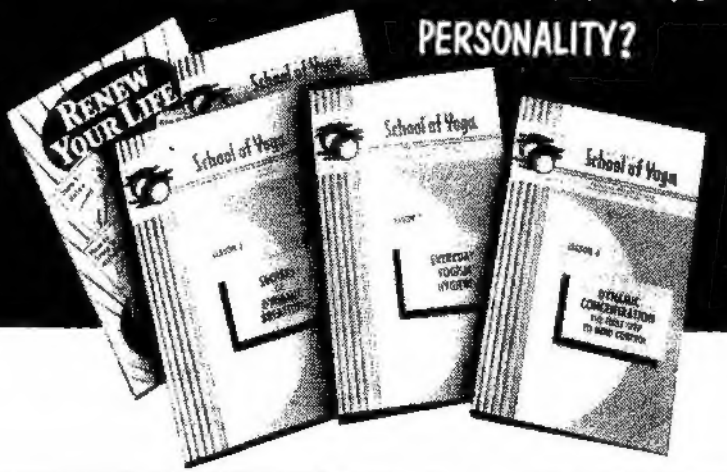
*

Many other features

WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM
ROBERT BLOCH

WHAT DO YOU SEEK FROM LIFE?

PSYCHIC POWERS? SELF CONFIDENCE? PERSONALITY?



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☐	☐	Do you finish every job you tackle?
☐	☐	Are you in tip-top shape physically?
☐	☐	Do you control tension, fear, worry, "nerves"?
☐	☐	Do people like you?
☐	☐	Are you "getting ahead" in your work?
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JULY 1955
Issue No. 12 (33)

OTHER WORLDS

Science Stories

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EDITORS:

RAY PALMER

BEA MAHAFFEY

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A letter from Bea today says: "I need an editorial for the next issue. Also an ad dummy." Well, the only dummy we have handy is your editor, and he's really a dummy this time because: 1) He doesn't know what stories are going to be in this issue; 2) He hasn't any idea of what's going to be on the cover—except that he's working desperately to make the deadline with a *full-color* cover, so we can discard the black and white photo covers which are extremely difficult to get, as our camera has a broken lens; 3) We have some ads, but haven't even written them up yet; 4) The engraver hasn't given us the price we asked him to give us—you know, the one where we get a full set of plates for the cost of a package of gum; 5) It may be that the lead novel this issue will be called "Narkeeta". So you see, we're just Michael McVague in person! Speaking of that word "novel", it really isn't. Sf magazines aren't thick enough any more to run novels, but it is quite a long story. Will take up more than half the book. In the future, we do plan to give you "novels". Maybe we'll have to break them into three novelettes, but we want to give you some of the better fiction that is crossing our desk (coming in on one mail and going out on the other, because we are lacking the money to build up an inventory.) So it happens this way —the story currently passing through the office, as we have money and a deadline approaching, is most likely to be bought. Now don't think we haven't an answer to this! Actually, we manage to "lose" a terrific story when we find it. Somewhere in our attic. In short, we stall and stall, hoping the author won't remember where he sent it. But he usually does, and when he does, sometimes we have to part with it regretfully, and

sometimes we can accept it. Narkeeta was one of those times; and to give you an idea of how long we've held it, this story was submitted as an entry in our defunct SCIENCE STORIES cover contest. We liked it well enough to place it on our list of "stories worth buying" even if the prize contest magazine had gone broke.

What do you see on the cover? How many colors? Gosh, we wish we knew. Maybe even we will be surprised. What do you see on the back cover? A full-color painting? If you do, it's probably a reprint. Best we can do for the time, but we're working for the future.

Anyway, whatever you see on this issue, or in it, is bound to prove one thing—we've made up our minds to put out the best science fiction magazine on the market, the most beautiful, and the most entertaining. It will try to be good science fiction, stories which everybody will like. A really hard job. But we are doing it this way: we are throwing out all bombastic ideas that we ourselves, personally, are worth the salt to make us palatable, but are studying all our competitors carefully and trying to incorporate the best in each magazine into ours.

We are going to give you, if possible, a story that Campbell of Astounding would accept; a story that Galaxy would find welcome; a story Howard Browne's new *Amazing* would present as "back to the good old days"; a story Isaac Asimov would rather sell to us than to *Imagination* because Henry Bott doesn't like Isaac. Well, we do! But right now we have little chance to get him, because our exchequer is almost non-existent.

Funny thing, that exchequer. We've been putting out magazines for a good many years now, and when we were working for somebody else, we always made good money. Now that we are on our own, we suffer from misjudgment of the market, bad guesses on distribution, and so on. Our previous boss hired competent circulation men. Obviously they were competent, because they sold more than we can, of the *same* product. They even sell better of the same product when we try to improve *our* product. Maybe we should take our hats off to those men and get out a few books and study up on circulation?

Well, for the time, we'll concentrate on the best magazine possible, and see what happens. We just can't afford a circulation director.

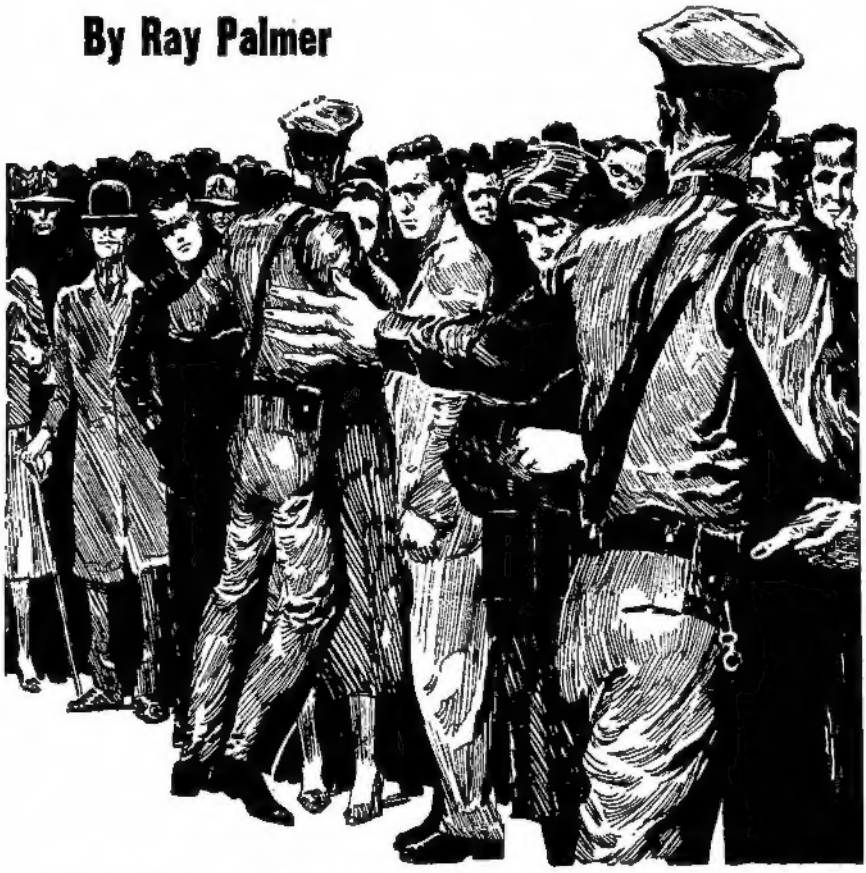
Actually, we look back at the past, and we remark on the fact that we're still in business. Guess we're lucky at that. A lot of the

(*Continued on page* 116)

"I'LL TELL MY

Remember when you were a kid in school, and you punched that "smart" little punk in the nose; and he went home crying, and threatening to "tell my big brother on you"? You didn't believe he had a big brother, did you? Well, read this story.

By Ray Palmer



BIG BROTHER"

HE was a snotty little punk; always acting smart and trying to push in with the big boys. You know the kind: make a pest out of himself, then if you tell him to scram, threaten to tell the principal or the teacher.

What could you do? You had to let him play along with you; and maybe the most you could do was treat him a little rough if you thought you could get away with it. Which wasn't often because he'd run off bawling and sure enough, he'd come back with the teacher, and we'd have to stay after school, the whole bunch of us. Of course he stayed too, to gloat. We could have wrung his scrawny little neck . . .

He *was* scrawny. In fact, he was the queerest looking kid any of us had seen. He looked like an imp, or something, with his wrinkled-up face, his big flapping ears, and his high forehead that somehow made him seem like a little old man, going bald. He was awkward, gnarled, and something less than childish. But he was just nine years old and an only child. His old man was a professor, or something, at the University, and his mother was dead.

Us kids didn't give it any thought then; we were too young—but even in our after-school days, we remembered there'd been some talk about something peculiar in their family. They were Rumanians, or something—anyway, some little country in Europe, and they'd left just ahead of Hitler's putsch. I don't remember the family name—it was something none of us could ever pronounce, but the kid's name was George, only they spelled it wrong, with an *i* on the end. Georgi. We called him Georgie-Porgie—and we sure wished we could stick a finger in his eye, but good!

There was talk about some experiment the old man had been performing in Rumania, silly stuff like cutting two different animals in half and then joining them together wrong, which was the reason he had to leave. But nobody ever proved anything; anyway there never seemed to be anything unusual after the professor came to this country. In fact, he had a good job at the university, and although he was considered rather . . . aloof, I think they called it . . . they considered him a good teacher. I never knew— I didn't go to college. I figured I didn't need any of that stuffed-shirt education. Guys with muscles draw down bigger pay these days than guys with brains. Brains are a dime a pound. And I'd learned a good right hand got results.

It was Joe Bleek who finally punched the little punk in the nose. Now fifteen years later, I can still remember how it flattened

beneath his knuckles, and how the blood squirted nine different ways. For a minute or two he wasn't saying anything but a loud screaming, which for once was sincere, and it sure brought everyone on the run, including the principal. And when everybody was gathered around, he gave it to us: "I'm gonna tell my big brother on you!"

We laughed fit to kill. We knew he didn't have a brother, and if he had, we wouldn't have cared how big he was—Joe's pretty big himself.

Joe got expelled from school for flattening the little guy's schnozzle (which stayed flat, incidentally), but he didn't care; he was going to quit school anyway. I quit after eighth grade.

I got a job driving a delivery wagon, and later a truck. I'm driving a big semi now, in the same company as Joe, my sidekick even today. As it turned out, the kid quit school too. His father took him out, and I guess he hired a private tutor for him. Anyway, we never saw him again. Nor his big brother!

Until today.

If you weren't downtown, maybe you saw it in the papers. It sure created a riot. But in case you don't know what happened, I'll tell it to you.

I was just about ready to take a load out, and my semi was waiting. I was checking my papers with the supe, when the big truck rolled down the street and stopped in front of the warehouse. We got an entrance on Clybourn street, which is just a block off Michigan, and it's a pretty heavily traveled street. We usually wheel the big trucks out the alleyway, and south from there, and parking a truck on Clybourn is an automatic ticket—if the cops happen around before you get going again.

So when the big truck stopped, we all looked at it. It wasn't one of ours, and in fact, it didn't seem to be anybody's. It didn't have any name on it, no company moniker of any kind. Well, you could have dropped me with a feather when the driver climbed down off the cab—and I do mean climbed, because it was exactly that. The driver was a little guy, no taller than four feet, and you'd have sworn he was just a kid—until he turned around.

Even before he turned around, you had to give him the double-take, because he was dressed the craziest you ever saw even a kid dressed. He was wearing, so help me, a little Lord Fauntleroy (or something like that) suit, with little knee pants, a wide white collar, a sort of a bib, and anklets. His little legs were bare, and his knees were bony and knobby as his gnarled hands sticking out of wide cuffs with button cuff-links in them. He

was also wearing a derby about nine sizes too small for him. It sat on his head like the slightest motion would shake it off, but it didn't fall off.

There was something about this silly suit that stirred memories in me even before he turned around and I saw his face. But it wasn't until I saw that flattened-out nose, and those gimlet eyes in a face framed by those flapping ears that I tumbled. It was Georgi!

You could have knocked me over with a feather, and I just stood there gaping while the little fellow walked around the rear of the trunk and opened her up. He let down the big tail-gate, which formed a ramp, like a horse-truck, and then he walked up into the truck.

I couldn't see what was in the truck, but I heard his high-pitched voice shrilling out in a series of nasal commands, and it seemed he was ordering some kind of animal out of the truck. But the people on the sidewalk behind the truck could see, and you could tell right away it was something unusual, nothing like a horse, by the way they stopped and stared. Those that stopped blocked the sidewalk for those behind them, and in a minute there was quite a crowd.

Joe and me got curious, like a few more of the drivers, and we got up and began to make our way out the warehouse door. All of a sudden the crowd shrank back, as though in fear, and a woman let out a shriek that cut through the noise of traffic like a knife. And suddenly, there was a strange kind of silence settled down on Clybourn street.

The little guy came stumbling down the ramp, the end of a rope in his hand. I watched the rope, waiting to see what was on the end of it. The crowd was backing up fast now, and a couple of kids were beginning to cry.

Finally the thing on the end of the rope came into view. It was a man! A great, hulking brute of a man, stark naked except for a loin cloth, and a little blue ribbon tied to a topknot of hair sticking straight up from the center of his skull. The man's bulk filled the whole end of the truck, and he had to stand crouched over. Even before he came down the ramp, it was obvious that he must stand more than twelve feet tall, and he couldn't have weighed less than two thousand pounds. A ton of man, with tremendous pillars of legs, enormous hulking shoulders, and long, dangling arms that bore hands that could have been used to bludgeon through brick walls!

The rope was tied around the giant's neck in a loose knot, and it might have been possible to slip it up over the head and off except for the tremendous ears the giant had. Those ears must have weighed

five pounds apiece. And now Georgi (no mistaking him any longer) was pulling the giant, tugging for him to come down the ramp. He did, and the ramp creaked under his tremendous weight. The big, bare feet slapped down on the pavement like sacks of wet cement might. And the big arms dragged knuckles like an ape's are supposed to. As he walked, his arms did part of the job, supported on those horny knuckles, which scraped along like stone against stone.

When the giant was out of the truck, Georgie turned forward, took the rope in his hand, and began walking—straight toward us. And he was looking straight at us too. All at once I began to tremble. The sight of this wizened, ugly looking kid—no, he wasn't kid any longer—was bad enough, with his smashed, raw-meat nose and his ghastly pasty complection; but the hulking monster lumbering along behind him was too much. It was unbelievable, a nightmare out of some Boris Karloff movie, a bit of the dawn of the world come back to life. I began to sweat, cold sweat that ran down my spine like bugs made of ice. I couldn't move, frozen to the spot as though my leg muscles had suddenly become paralyzed.

Georgi stopped in front of Joe, and the nightmare behind him stopped too, slobbering noises coming from its flabby lips, spittle drooling down its hairy chest. For a minute Georgi looked Joe up and down, then his nasal voice scratched across my eardrums like sandpaper.

"I've brought my big brother, Joe Bleek," he said. "Now I'll bet you're sorry you punched me in the nose!"

WHAT happened next was confusing to many, and the papers got a lot of it wrong. But I had a ringside seat, you might say, and besides I was the only one there who knew the background of what was going on, and knew in advance what to expect. The minute Georgi announced he'd brought his big brother, I knew that destiny had caught up with Joe Bleek and quite possibly with me. Little Georgi had come back out of our past to exact vengeance for that flattened nose of his, and as Joe Bleek stared in horrified astonishment at the hulking bulk of the naked giant, more ape than human, you could see on his face that Georgi was right—he was sorry as hell!

All I could think was a sort of silly "so he *did* have a brother!" The words kept running through my mind like an unholy sort of requiem. Not so much because I was afraid of the big brother (and I certainly was!) but because of

something else that kept pushing the words across the threshold of my consciousness from a dark memory that lay somewhere behind, a memory that had to do with the reason Georgi's father had had to leave Rumania.

I still remembered the silly stories that were passed around the neighborhood by the local dimbrains (or that's what we thought they were at the time), about how Georgi's father was some kind of a biologist or physiologist or something, back in Rumania, and he'd done a lot of experimenting on animals, making them into something else than what they originally were. Like that story of cutting two animals in half, then sewing them together wrong. We older boys had laughed our heads off about that one, intriguing as it almost forced itself to be to our youthful imaginations; especially when we got to picturing the actuality. Like the front part of a cow sewed to the rear half of an elephant; or the rear half of a cow sewed to the rear half of a horse. When we pictured it that way, the whole thing was good for a real belly laugh.

Somehow, right at this precise instant, I wasn't laughing. The frightening reality of that unbelieveable giant, human yet not human, looming before us, uttering slobbering noises, and making scraping noises on the pavement with its incredible knuckles as it swung its arms around with ponderous clumsiness, was no laughing matter. It was real, it was there! Terrifying so.

There was nothing incongruous about it. Deep inside me I didn't doubt at all that it *was* Georgi's big brother! Even though nobody had ever seen the brother when I was in school, I didn't doubt it now. How it could be, I didn't know, and my reasoning mind tried to tell me so: Georgi's mother had died from peritonitis about two years after Georgi was born. My mother had told me that. I remembered it now as just one item of the little things that were pushing at me from deep within my memory. I *had* to have some rationalization for the monster before me, and even in the heat of excitement, that rationalization was going on. It was the rationalization that led me to go to the police afterward. But right now . . .

Joe Bleek was sorry all right! And he wasn't the big bully any longer, just a yellow streak a yard wide, and I could see it now, after being unable to realize it all these years. I was trembling but Joe Bleek was positively shuddering. He was ghastly white, and he seemed almost palsied.

All at once I felt filled with disgust. And with a sense of personal shame that I hadn't felt up to now. True, I'd had to thrust back a few

"sissy" feelings that day years ago when I'd seen the result of Joe's cruel blow against Georgi's nose, but they had been easy to thrust back— Georgi had been such a pain in the neck to all of us.

"My big brother is going to punch you in the nose," said Georgi, his voice still high and squeaky and nasal. "Just like you punched me, Joe Bleek, only harder. He's going to punch your stupid face right through your skull!"

He turned to the monster behind him, and dropped the rope that was tied around the monster's neck. "Punch him in the nose, Alekhi!" he shouted. And as he turned and pointed at Joe Bleek, Joe recovered his leg power, at least, and whirled around as if the devil himself were behind him and ran. He had an easy pathway, because the crowd in the streets gave way as though a knife had parted them. And as he ran, the giant lumbered after him.

One thing about the giant, he wasn't fast. He was too big to be fast. It wasn't more than a few seconds before Joe was out of sight around the corner, heading for South Milwaukee, and I was sure he'd be there in record time. And when Joe disappeared, the giant stopped. He came to a halt in the middle of the street and hunkered down on his huge haunches, idly scratching himself with one hairy, horny hand for all the world like an ape scratching fleas.

And at that moment the police arrived, sirens screaming. They came from both ends of the block, and patrolmen piled out and ran up, brandishing clubs and some of them wielding riot guns.

Georgi ran to his big brother and picked up the end of the rope. "Come on, Alekhi!" he said. "Let's go home. We'll get Joe Bleek later." He began to lead the naked giant toward the big truck.

A beefy cop, brandishing a riot gun, ran up and aimed it at Alekhi. But before he could pull the trigger, Georgi was on him like a little fury. "Don't you shoot my brother!" he shrieked. "Don't you dare shoot my big brother!"

The burly cop blinked, and lowered his gun in complete astonishment. He peered at Georgi incredulously. "Your . . .brother!" he burst out. "Your *brother!*" He looked at the now hunkering Alekhi again. "That . . . that gorilla's your . . . brother!"

"Of course he is," squeaked Georgi. "And he has as much right as anybody to come downtown."

The captain of police, flashing his badge, came running up in time to hear this last. He turned to the baffled patrolman. "What's all this, Finnegan? Why don't you shoot that gorilla! He'll murder the whole crowd if he goes for 'em!"

"No he won't," said Georgi, eye-

ing the captain like he was an obnoxious insect. "Alekhi's my brother, and I brought him downtown see the sights. He's never seen the big buildings."

Well, I suppose you've guessed it by now—Georgi was playing it clever. He had come down to have Alekhi get vengeance for that punch in the nose back in his school days, and had failed, at least temporarily. And now, caught in the open with Alekhi, he was bluffing it out. And the worst of it was, he would succeed at it. After all, Alekhi wasn't a gorilla, and he wasn't murdering the crowd, and he *did* have a right to be here.

The captain stared at Alekhi a long moment, getting redder and redder in the face. Obviously what he was seeing was having the same effect on him as it had had on everybody else. But he had the advantage of a rational explanation to calm his first emotions of fear. This, he was being informed, was only a "big brother" who had a right.

The captain recovered his wits now, and with them, the key to the whole situation as far as he was concerned.

"Maybe he's your brother, out to see the sights," he announced, "but there's a law in this city about going around naked. And there's also a law about disturbing the peace, and one about inciting a riot, and one about obstructing traffic, and . . ."

" . . .and one about parking a truck on this side of the street," interposed the officer with the riot gun.

The captain glared at the officer an instant. Then he barked: "Correct, Officer Finnegan. And accordingly, do your duty. Arrest them both!" And so saying, he turned back to lose himself in a reflective survey of the unbelievable hulk known as Alekhi.

"Arrest . . ." began Finnegan, then came to a verbal halt. His beefy neck began to grow red, and his face began to grow pale. But he recovered as the Captain threw a momentary glare in his direction. He waved the riot gun ominously at Georgi. "Okay, kid, let's get going. We'll go down to the station. You're both under arrest."

"All right," said Georgi complacently. "I can pay the fine. And then we can resume our tour of the city."

"Not without clothes," said the captain darkly. But as he said it; I could see the baffled look in his eyes. It was becoming obvious to everybody that Alekhi was actually harmless, and beyond his immense size, he *was* human, and did have every right accorded to every other citizen.

"Of course not," said Georgi sweetly. "Alekhi doesn't like to

wear clothes, but he will, if you say so."

That did it. The captain was licked right there. His next words proved it.

"Finnegan!" he barked. "We'll never get that big slob through the jail door! And besides, he looks peaceful, as the kid says." He turned to Georgi. "Okay, I'll let you go this time. Get your big brother back into that truck, and take him home. And the next time you come out, put some clothes on him. I can see you didn't mean any harm, and the reaction of the crowd wasn't your fault. I'll send some reporters out to take some pictures of him, and get a story for the papers, then everybody'll know about him, and that he's just a freak. After that, I don't see why he can't travel around, so long as he doesn't bust anything."

"Yes sir," said Georgi meekly, but as he said it, I thought I saw a gleam in his little pinpoint eyes. And as he led Alekhi up the ramp into the truck, I was sure of it—because he looked straight at me, and there was a wicked smirk on his face. Little Georgie Porgie wasn't through with Joe Bleek by a long shot, and maybe he wasn't through with me. And as he climbed into the cab of the truck and began wheeling it down Clybourn, I had a funny feeling at the pit of my stomach. But I didn't know exactly what to do about it.

BY the time I got back from my run, I couldn't stand it any longer. It was after midnight, but I went out to Joe Bleek's place near Hales Corners. He lived in a big old house that he'd rented because it had a big barn where he could park his truck. Besides, there were things that Joe did that he felt were easier to do from a place in the country. I didn't know exactly what they were, but I didn't care much. I made my living my way, and I figured Joe could make his way, and that's all it meant to me.

There were no lights in the house, but there was one in the barn, so I figured Joe was either just coming in, or ready to go out with his big truck, so I walked around to the rear, leaving my car parked out in the front.

I got to the open barn door and called out. "Hey, Joe . . . you here?"

There wasn't any answer, and the place was silent as a tomb. As I thought of the silence, a shudder went through me. There wasn't even the usual noise of crickets, and all at once I didn't want to go into the barn. But I did, and what I saw drew all the strength out of my legs. It was all I could do to get back to my car and get it started, and head back for town. And for a couple of miles, the car kept

spurting forward like a jackrabbit from the way my trembling foot was shaking on the gas pedal. I kept on going too fast around curves, with my unsteady foot, but I couldn't control it. I was scared!

Scared of Georgi's big brother!

What I'd seen in that barn gave me the best reason in the world to be scared.

I pulled up in front of the police station with brakes shrieking, and for once the cops were on their toes. There was one of them just coming out the station door, and in a minute he had me by the collar and was yapping: "Reckless driving, if I ever saw it! Come on inside, you."

I was only too glad to comply, and as I stumbled across the threshold, I gasped out: "Georgi told his big brother on us, and Joe Bleek's been murdered already!"

Startled, the cop halted me in mid stride. "What's that you say? Murdered? Say, you drunk or something?" He sniffed my breath, and as he did so, I repeated what I'd said, only I left out the part about Georgi squealing to his brother. "Joe Bleek's been murdered," I said. "His body's in his barn, out near Hales Corners."

We made the trip out to Bleek's barn in a lot less time than I'd made it away from there in my own car, and with a lot less jerkiness. One thing I can say for those cops, they can drive a police car! And as soon as they had confirmed the truth of my story, they listened with respect to my fears. They looked around the barnyard with their flashlights, and soon found the tracks of a truck, fresh from this same rather dewy evening, and the clincher was the discovery of the great naked footprints of Alekhi.

Terror struck me anew when I saw them, and the last thing in the world I wanted was to go along with them to Georgi's home. But the sergeant assured me they'd already radioed for help, and a whole slew of patrol cars, with fully-armed crews, would have the place surrounded by the time we arrived. And then we'd arrest Georgi and Alekhi.

In spite of my terror, I almost laughed in their faces. "Arrest that monster!" I exclaimed. "You'll never do it! That Georgi's as insane as his father was!"

"His father? What do you know about his father?" asked the sergeant.

I explained the whole thing to him, even the stories the kids used to tell about the animals cut apart and sewed together in a cockeyed manner. "But now that I remember it," I said, "those stories must have had some basis in fact. The old man was some kind of scientist, and he always had guinea pigs and

white mice and such stuff around. Georgi used to bring them to school sometimes. And the minute I saw Alekhi, I got a suspicion that my mother once had."

"And what's that?"

"Well, my mother was quite a card when it came to back-fence gossip, and she always did make a lot out of Georgi's mother dying of peritonitis. You know, Mother always prided herself on her ability to tell when one of her neighbors was pregnant. Sometimes she even informed the father before he got the news from his wife. And she has always said that Georgi's mother was pregnant before she died. Yet there never was any mention of anything like that being a factor in her death. You see, she died in the care of her husband, who didn't believe in the local doctors, and one was called in only to sign the death certificate. My idea was that there was a baby, and it was a monster, and that it was a monster because of something the father did to the mother. He was quite an expert on hormones, and frequently gave lectures at the university on the biological effect of hormones on human evolution."

"The old man's dead," said the sergeant. "At least I read it that way in the papers."

"Yes," I said, "but the kid, Georgi, may have gone on with the thing after the old man died, keeping his big brother secret until now, when he was full grown and he could come out and use him as he threatened long ago—to kill Joe Bleek, and those others of us against whom he had a grudge."

"Well, we'll find out in a few minutes," said the sergeant as the police car slowed down then stopped beside another parked in the dark.

"Everybody spotted?" he called from the car window.

"All set," came a voice from the other patrol car.

"Okay, let's go,"

I didn't want to, but I did. And that's where I got this flattened nose. You see, it took almost twenty machine gun slugs to stop Alekhi, once Georgi led him out of the house and spying me, sicced him on me. It took only one slug to drop Georgi, but when Alekhi finally reached me, he weighed a couple pounds more, due to the lead in him. Whatever it was, one flailing fist caught me full in the face before his body rolled to a halt at my feet. The blood squirted nine different ways as my nose flattened beneath the horny knuckles of the dead Alekhi.

Maybe it was justice. But I ain't so pretty to look at any more. All I've got to say now is that if anybody ever threatened to tell his big brother on you, lay off right there! He just might have one!

THE COWARD

If there was a coward on board, Doc had a nasty job to do. It was all in a day's work, and you'd find it listed in the Manual of Procedure, Article 47.

By James W. Power

ROGER Lee, our new physicist-engineer, was yellow according to Sam Stelfa. It took less than three minutes from blast-off time for Sam to form his opinion and pass it on to the rest of us. He was the only one strong enough to heave himself up on his elbows against the terrific acceleration and look around to see what was going on.

"What's the matter, Lee?" he bellowed. "Don't you like getting off Earth?"

I twisted my head so I could see Lee who lay strapped on his bunk next to mine. He was scared all right. At Sam's words he only opened his mouth ineffectually, like a fish gasping on a dry river bank.

"Cripe," Sam said, "that's all we need. Somebody who's yellow."

"Lay off, Sam," I said. "Blast-off scares everybody the first time."

That was true. It still scared me even though it was old stuff. Like most of the crew, I'd been on the three previous space expeditions, the two moon hops and the long, long one to Mars. But blast-off still gave me the willies. I knew it bothered most of the others, too, although none of us said much about it. Maybe it didn't bother Sam, for he was one of those rare persons who doesn't seem to have sense enough to be afraid of anything.

Sam undid his straps and got up, for the acceleration had eased up

enough to let us move around. He came over to where I was struggling up and said, "Sure it scares everybody, but not that much Look at him."

It wasn't pretty. I remembered a deer I'd shot once, breaking its back so it couldn't run. It had had that same terrified look in its eyes before I put another shot through its head. Still, I wasn't going to condemn Lee on looks. Some people can hide their emotions, including fear, better than others. I told Sam that as he helped me up and we moved off toward the galley.

"It isn't just that," Sam argued. "I've been keeping my eye on him ever since he was assigned. Didn't you notice him during quarantine? Every time we'd get to talking about free space or fighting the natives on Mars last trip, he'd get up and leave. I tell you he's yellow I wish I'd reported him in time for them to get us a different P-E. Space is no place for a coward."

Sam was right about that. Fear is contagious, and it's bad medicine when you're cooped up together in a ship for long months at a time. In fact, anything that disrupts harmony and causes friction among crew members is dangerous. If a man cracks up in space or develops behavior tendencies which result in tensions among the crew, he must be disposed of. Provision for such extreme action was incorporated into the *United States Manual of Procedures for Extra-Terrestial Flights* at the insistence of psychiatrists who had foreseen the dangers inherent in such situations. It had happened only once before, and it wasn't pleasant. Disposing of a man you've lived and worked with is a nasty job. The decision and action rests with me as ship's doctor, and it's a damned grave responsibility.

It was odd the psychiatrists had let Lee through. Always before they had screened space assignees thoroughly and weeded out those who were unstable in any way. However, the long anticipated East-West war had broken out a short time before, and that had over shadowed other things. SpaceCom was anxious to get us away again before the Eastern bloc located our base and dropped a guided missile on the *Astron*. We needed a physicist-engineer to replace Leeksohn who'd been killed on Mars, and apparently the medics checked Lee's professional qualities and physical condition and okayed him without bothering much about his mental make-up. Now it was too late to do anything about it.

"There's no use riding him," I told Sam. "You'll just make it worse."

"Rats," Sam said. "If a guy's yellow, you've got to ride him until you cure him. Coddle him, and he

figures he can get away with it."

There's no use arguing with a conviction like that. I got a couple of vacutainers of coffee and went back to quarters. Lee had unstrapped himself and was sitting on the bunk still looking pale and sick. He looked like a young, scared kid. He couldn't have been over twenty-two-or-three. I handed him his coffee and sat down opposite him on my bunk.

"How you feeling now?" I asked.

He looked at me as though trying to figure out if I, too, were getting ready to ride him. Finally he said, "Sort of shaky."

"Don't let it get you," I said. "Blast-off is no fun for any of us."

He looked around to see if anybody were listening to us. "It isn't just blast-off," he said. "The whole thing scares me. I—I guess I've always led a pretty sheltered life. Never had to risk my life or fight anybody. The whole thing terrifies me." His voice sounded ready to break. "Leaving Earth . . maybe running into a meteor . . . having something go wrong with the ship so we drift around out here forever . . . fighting with the Martians . . ."

"Why did you come along then?" I asked. "You could have told the psych boys all this and they'd have washed you out."

"P-E's are scarce," he said. "Those in good enough physical condition to stand space flight. I decided I was needed. Maybe I shouldn't have come if I'm yellow like Stelfa says, but — this expedition is pretty important, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it's pretty important. We're pioneers in a way. If this atomic warfare goes too far, it may be necessary to colonize Mars and start all over. We learned quite a bit about the planet last trip, but we didn't try to live here under conditions colonists would have to. That's what we're going to do this time. It's damned important."

"That's what I thought," Lee said. "That's why I came."

I slapped him on the shoulder. "I wouldn't worry about being yellow. You'll be okay. Your coming along shows that." His look of gratitude told me I'd acquired a friend and protege. I wondered if I'd regret it. Maybe Sam was right. If he were, Lee would have to be disposed of sooner or later. I put the thought away from me and said, "Come on, let's go have a look outside through the observation port."

The fear came back in his eyes. I knew how he felt. Sitting there in quarters where there were no ports, you could imagine you were simply in a fast moving rocket a few miles above Earth. But once you looked out the observation port at the emptiness outside, you couldn't pretend any longer. Some men love space and will spend long

hours at the observation port staring out. Those are the space-nuts, and I'm one of them. Others never become used to it and will come aboard and never look out from the time the ship blasts off until it has landed again. You can never tell in advance how you, or any other man, will react to space, but it is important that the first look come as soon as possible so that any necessary mental adjustments can be made before a morbid fear of the unknown builds up.

I took Lee's arm and said, "Let's go. This is one thing you have to do and do soon. We may as well do it now."

I led the way to the observation room, hoping Lee would be one of those who loved space. Sam Stelfa did not, although he did not fear it as some did. Sam was our quartermaster and a man of action. Space to him was simply an unpleasant obstacle that must be spanned in order for him to find adventure on alien worlds.

We approached the observation port and I said, "There it is."

By now we were several thousand miles out from Earth, and the view was one of indescribable blackness studded with flaming stars a thousand times brighter than they ever appeared on Earth. I could feel Lee tense beside me, but I said nothing.

"It's beautiful," he said at last "It's terrifying, but it's beautiful." I knew then that no matter how much blast-off might bother him or strange worlds frighten him with their perils, he was a spaceman. It's a strange magic that drags you away from the good, green Earth again and again once it has captured you. I walked away and left him standing there.

Sam was still in the galley. I went up to him and said, "Come along. I want to show you something."

When he saw where we were going, he said, "What the devil, Doc? You know I don't like to stare at space."

"Keep quiet," I said. I pointed to Lee who was still standing in front of the port. "Now what do you think?"

Sam swore and said, "A space-nut. That just goes to show you can't figure them." He made a gesture of dismissal. "It doesn't signify. I still say he's yellow. We'll have to dispose of him yet."

That was Sam's opinion, and he clung to it doggedly. He had many occasions in the weeks that followed to observe Lee and denounce him as a coward. There are many things that can happen in space to startle and unnerve one— the sudden clangor of the alarm that warns of an approaching meteor or the ghostly glow like St. Elmo's fire that fills the ship when it plunges

through one of those unexplained areas of magnetic disturbance that dot space. Even the sudden thought that only the thin walls of the ship protect you from the airless, heatless void outside is enough to make the sweat stand out on your face.

There was even one of those billions-to-one things happened to give Sam a chance to ride Lee. We were sitting around the recreation cabin when a small meteor, no larger than a marble, hit the ship. It went entirely through, entering the top of the room and angling out through the bulkhead. For a fraction of a second there was a shrill hiss of escaping air before the self-sealing liner closed over the holes.

We had all been instructed what to do in such a situation, but this was the first time it had ever happened. The sealer was only a temporary measure designed to give us time to slap emergency sealing disks over the holes. The rubbery fabric would hold for perhaps thirty seconds before the pressure inside the ship ripped it apart. If that happened, our air would rush out and we all wouldn't die horribly. We knew that, and yet we sat there stunned until Sam jumped to his feet.

He slapped Lee across the face and screamed, "Don't sit there, damn you! Seal that hole."

He whirled to rip a rack of sealing disks off the bulkhead. He handed one to Lee who had risen to his feet by then. By some unspoken understanding Sam took the hole in the top of the cabin and Lee the one in the bulkhead. There was no waste motion in their actions. Each slapped a disk over the respective punctures and made sure they were anchored securely. We were safe enough then. Later, riggers would go out on the hull in their space-suits and weld permanent plugs in the holes. Perhaps twenty seconds had passed since the meteor hit us. Lee leaned against the bulkhead and suddenly was sick on the deck.

Sam looked at him in disgust. "Yellow," he said. "Yellow as they come."

Several of the men protested for Sam was being unfair. My own stomach was queasy, and I guessed I was not alone. If that meteor had been much bigger, there would have been no chance for us. Lee had been no more stunned than the rest of us.

Jessup, the biologist, spoke up. "Lay off him, Stelfa. We're getting tired of your big mouth."

Sam whirled on him . "Who are you to talk? I didn't notice you doing anything."

"By God, if you're insinuating . . ."

"Cut it," I said. "You both know better than to act this way."

I grabbed Sam's arm, and as I turned to pull him away I saw the

captain and the executive officer enter the cabin.

"What's going on here?" the captain asked.

"A meteor hit us and punctured two holes," I said. "Lee and Stelfa sealed them before the liner blew."

The captain and the executive officer inspected the disks. "Send Ames and O'Leary out to weld plugs in place." the captain told the exec. He turned to the rest of us and said, "According to the law of probability we should be able to cruise for several thousand more years without having to worry about this happening again. My congratulations to you, Lee, and you, Stelfa, for your fast thinking."

He turned to leave and motioned for me to follow him. When we were outside the cabin he said, "There was more going on in there than reaction to a surprise happening. What's the trouble?"

"Stelfa has been riding Lee," I said. "He says he's a coward. Some of the men are starting to resent Sam's overbearing attitude."

"Is Lee a coward?"

"I wouldn't want to say that, John," I said. "Let's just say he's still green, and his imagination is overactive."

"I don't like this business of Stelfa riding him. A thing like that that can get the men divided into two camps."

"I know it," I said. "It looks like trouble."

The captain sighed and his eyes looked old and tired. "See if you can't head it off, Doc. And watch both Lee and Stelfa pretty close We don't want . . ." I know what he was thinking.

I went back to the recreation cabin and drew Sam aside. "Listen, Sam, stop riding Lee. You're just getting yourself in bad."

"I'm doing it to save all our necks," Sam said. "We can't have a coward letting us down, and that's what he'll do when the going gets rough."

"It looks as though you *want* him to crack up," I said.

"If he's going to, I hope it's out here," Sam said. "Then we can dispose of him before he does any damage."

"You talk damned easily about disposing of people," I said angrily, "considering it's neither your responsibility nor job."

I turned and walked away. Sam had always been a friend, as every man in the crew should be in space travel, but that friendship was wearing thin. However, I couldn't blame him completely for he believed he was right. He was a realist, and what he said had some merit if it were true.

I tried to shut out the memory of Jensen, the man who had gone space mad on the other Mars trip. I could still remember how his body

looked as it revolved around the ship like a small moon after we dumped him out the airlock. It had stayed there until we got into Mars' gravitational field. He'd been dead, of course, when we put him out. A needle filled with morphine had seen to that. We wouldn't make the mistake of just tossing a body out again, though, if it were necessary to dispose of someone. A small hand rocket attached to the body would carry it safely away from the ship. I looked at young Lee, and for an instant I seemed to see him moving away from the ship, the rocket strapped to him growing dimmer as it disappeared in the distance. I shook my head to dispel the vision and walked over to him.

"Let's go to the galley and have coffee," I said. "I need it after that excitement."

He smiled wanly and said, "I could use some too, I guess."

As we sat sipping our coffee, I said, "Why don't you fight back at Sam? That's the only language he understands. He hasn't any right to ride you."

Lee looked at me in surprise and said, "But he does, Doc. Sam is a brave man, and I'm not. I don't blame him for riding me, and I don't mind it really." He toyed with his spoon and continued. "Sam's everything I'd like to be and never will be. But he's wrong about one thing. I'm not going to crack-up. I don't know how I know that, but I do."

"Listen," I said, "don't make the mistake of idolizing Sam. He's not really brave. He just hasn't sense enough to be afraid. And he's becoming intolerant. That's worse than fear, sometimes and more dangerous. To all of us."

My talk with Sam and the growing resentment of the rest of the crew seemed to have little effect on his treatment of Lee. Indeed, he seemed to step up his campaign as though in a desperate attempt to break Lee as soon as possible. He even volunteered to clamber along the outside of the ship and inspect the hull and goaded Lee into accompanying him. Creeping around on the hull of a space ship is something most of us can do without for a long, long time, and we tried to dissuade Lee from going. He was determined, if pale, so we helped him into a spacesuit and watched him follow Sam into the airlock. Sam's torture backfired that time, for Lee was a space-nut and Sam had no love for the void. He didn't bother Lee for almost twenty-four hours after that.

Part of Lee's job was to make periodic inspections of the atomic motors to prevent any trouble. Motors of this type have a tendency to run wild sometimes, drawing in a supply of the radioactive fuel faster than they should. This may

result simply in a temporary flare-up that does little damage except to give the rocket too much power for a short time. This is serious enough as it upsets pre-plotted courses and makes it necessary for the astrogator to compute a new course to compensate for it.

A wild motor can begin to draw in fuel so rapidly, however, that it builds up faster than it possibly can be used. When that happens, as it has in test models on Earth, the motor must be cleared manually, or there will be a full-fledged Atomic explosion. That is the constant worry of the physicist-engineer in space. Entering the rocket chamber and clearing a wild motor is fatal because of the uncontrolled radiation the motor is throwing off. It is a great responsibility, too, for in attempting to clear the motor it is possible to jam it in such a way as to cause an immediate explosion. We had had only one wild motor on the *Astron*, and that had flared up so briefly that it was all over before Leeksohn, our P-E at the time, had reached the rocket chamber.

We had just passed the halfway mark to Mars when our second wild motor happened. We were at midday chow when the voice of Rocketman Lathmar came over the loudspeaker, "Flare-up in the rocket chamber!" Flare-up in the rocket chamber!"

Lee dropped his fork and jumped up from the table. He left the room on the run. Sam, whose job it was to decontaminate the rocket chamber after a flare-up was close on his heels. I followed them because I might be needed although a doctor is apt to be of no use in such a situation. I paused on the way to pick up a needle full of morphine. A man burned by intense radiation dies slowly and painfullly unless . . .

I passed Sam who had stopped for his decontamination gear. When I arrived in the rocket control station, Lee was busy examining gauges and questioning the two Rocketmen. He glanced up briefly and said. "It'll be okay. Just a temporary flare-up."

I sat down suddenly, for my legs seemed to have lost most of their strength. Just then Sam came in. He looked at the guages and the red warning light that was blinking rapidly. He grabbed Lee by the shoulder and swung him around. "Why aren't you in there clearing that motor?" he shouted.

"It's just a flare-up," Lee said. "It will be okay in a few minutes."

"Okay? Look at that gauge!" Sam shook Lee and said, "You're afraid to go in there, aren't you?"

"There's no need to," Lee said. "It'll quiet down in a minute."

"I knew your gutlessness would cause us trouble," Sam said. "Maybe you're too yellow to save the

ship, but I'm not." He thrust Lee from him and began snatching tools from the rack.

Lee got up from the deck where Sam's shove had sent him sprawling. He got between Sam and the door to the rocket chamber. "I tell you it's all right, Sam. You'll just make it blow if you fool with it. I won't let you in."

"*You* won't let me in?" Sam laughed viciously and clubbed Lee with his fist. "Out of my way, coward."

The blow spun Lee over against the tool rack. As he slumped there half- dazed, Sam moved over to the door of the rocket chamber and began unscrewing the bright red wing nuts that held it shut. Lee slowly straightened and silently reached for a long spanner wrench in the tool rack behind him. As Sam was undoing the last wing nut, Lee stepped up behind him and felled him with a short chop with the wrench. Then he turned and began examining the gauges again.

I knelt beside Sam and felt his pulse. It was beating strongly. The blow had only stunned him. "How is the motor?" I asked.

Lee turned from checking the dials and said, "It's slacking off. Almost down to normal."

"Then you were right," I said. "Sam probably would have caused an explosion if he'd fooled with motor, wouldn't he?"

"I'm afraid so," Lee said, "but it was a brave idea. I'm sorry I had to hit him."

"It wasn't bravery," I said, "it was stupidity. That and a self-cenered unwillingness to accept the discipline of letting each man do his job without interfering. The motor was your job, not Sam's, and his meddling could have destroyed us all. The bullheadedness and blindness are too dangerous to tolerate any longer."

I think Lee guessed what I was about to do for he started to protest, a look of horror on his face. "No, Lee," I said, "this is *my* job. Will you call the captain for me? I want to report that I'm using the emergency powers prescribed under Article 72 of the Manual of Procedure."

I slid the point of the morphine needle into Sam's arm.

THE END

Out of the skies came the strange ship bearing two men, a monster, and a woman as beautiful as a golden goddess; four strangers, bringing death and destruction to peaceful Minanah. Opposing them was Narkeeta, the dark-eyed Little Flower, whose courage and determination led her to defy her god and her people, and to seek vengeance for herself.

NARKEETA

By Evelyn Martin

AS the morning sun rose quietly over the distant blue hills, its light was caught and reflected by an unusual object that rested on the plain, near the edge of the jungle-like forest. A great roebuck lifted his antlered head and stared, mouth still dripping, at the gleaming thing on the prairie. Even the singing of the birds was stilled. The roebuck wheeled rapidly, and raced from the scene on flying feet. There was a whirr of wings as his passage disturbed a covy of quail—then that, too, died into silence.

The winged oblong rested in a circle of smouldering ashes. Small wisps of smoke floated skyward here and there, where the jet fires had not yet been smothered. The plain rolled away behind it, rising abruptly into jagged foothills. From one of these hills a puff of white rose suddenly, then another, and another. They might have been fleecy clouds in the morning sky, had they not risen in such a definite pattern, to be repeated in kind many miles away.

The three men inside the ship noticed none of these things, for they felt secure inside their armored vessel. The protective screen was on full power, creating a ring of destruction for fifty feet around its resting place. Here and there about the circle a small blackened carcass was mute testimony of the screen's ability. Not a moving thing could penetrate that field—not a rabbit, nor an ant, or a field mouse. They were safe—safe on Minanah, with its fabulous riches and ancient legend.

The lone woman on the vessel did not seem to share their jubilation. She was very lovely, and also very frightened. She stared at the men through wary eyes, heavy though they were with exhaustion.

A purple bruise marred the creamy smoothness of her jaw, and her golden hair lay lank and untended on the shoulders of her space-stained overall. Nana knew these men well, knew she had reason for her fear and distrust. Even now, she could see every word filmed on their records with clarity, just as she had seen them so many times in the Penal Office on Pluto.

Ben Corio, the handsome and evil self-appointed leader of the trio. He was the most dangerous criminal in the Federated Galaxies, a mad dog sick with the desire for power. He was no little criminal, this Corio, for he had been responsible for the deaths of more than four hundred humanoids in the course of his nefarious activities. Capital punishment had been outlawed a century before by the Federation, so he was sent to the Penal Colony on Pluto for study and research.

Mike Patton—short, fat, bestial. His sex murders had alarmed four

galaxies. He had left a trail of broken, mutilated females over twenty planets. He was sent to Pluto for his ravishing of a little Venusian water-sprite. The Venusians were the most helpless, gentle creatures in the universe. Any human who would harm one of the delicate females was beyond medical or operative help. There was no place left for him but Pluto.

Vrkka, the Martian traitor. He sold out his world and his people for a price. He had blown up eighty of the canals that were so necessary to his dying planet, before he was apprehended. Though the horror of his dead world had brought an end to war between the Galaxies forever, there was no help for his murdered people. There were very few Martians still in existence to punish this creature, so their fellow humanoids had joined them in sending him to the living death of Pluto.

Nana's father had been Medical Warden at the Penal Colony, and she had worked with him since her graduation from the Solar Academy. His life had been devoted to these mental cripples who were his special charge. He believed they could be made well, relieved of their awful burden of guilt and sickness, if only he could find the way.

He did not live to find it. Nana shuddered again as she remembered the dreadful night the three men had forced their way into the Warden's Quarters, and murdered her parents before her eyes. She was never to know the manner of their escape, for they carried her with them in their stolen patrol ship, into nightmare.

Many times she had thanked Providence for Vrkka's presence aboard the craft. Ben and Mike had outsmarted themselves when they chose him as third man in their escape attempt. The Martians had been noted for their reverence of the female, and even in his degraded condition, Vrkka still carried within him the instinct of his race. He was physically incapable of mating with an Earthwoman, which may have been a contributing factor in his protection of her; regardless of the reason, she was thankful. The other men were afraid of the huge Martian, who would no more mind slitting their throats than stepping on an insect. She could see no end to the checkmated violence, the endless flight and fear.

At least they had reached the end of their journey. They were far from the charted star lanes, on what Corio believed to be the beautiful and half-forgotten planet of Minanah, circling a strange sun in a strange galaxy.

The legend of Minanah had come down from antiquity, growing more illogical as legends do.

In the dawn of the old atomic age, about the time of the first space travel, there lived an ancient strain of red people on the planet Earth. At that time Earth had been divided into sub-sections called races, and these people were called American Indians.

In the beginning they were the sole owners of the American continent, but that was in the predawn of history, even before the advent of the atom. White Caucasians from the other continents discovered the rich land, and found it easy to wrest it from the simple savages. The Indians were forced from their homelands, and the continent became a white America. The red men found themselves a minority in their own land, shunted about by their oppressors, pushed onto small reservations of land set aside especially for them. Their villages were pestholes of disease, their people uneducated and lethargic.

No more could the Indian live his life under the open sky, and hunt game in the virgin forests. The wooded areas disappeared, were replaced by towering steel cities and hydroponic gardens. Still there were a few red men who held hope for their people, who fought injustice and intolerance as they clawed their way up the ladder of freedom.

Such a man was Jimmy Drinkwater. He became a space pilot, one of the first explorers of the great depths beyond the sky. He ventured far, into uncharted regions undreamed of by man. He returned nearly a generation later with a tale of a planet exceedingly rich, almost a duplicate of his beloved Earth in her infancy, except for the presence of man. He brought with him diamonds, minerals, precious ores. Eventually he gathered a few courageous families about his banner of hope. He led their expedition himself, though he knew he would never live to see his dream again.

He was rumored to have left maps for his people to follow, and a written journal of the miracle of the new land. There was even a tale of a great spirit who welcomed him and promised him protection for his people.

Naturally, the expedition was never heard from again. In the years that followed, the strange story faded from the memory of all but a few. The tale lingered on, changing through the ages. In time, it was carried to Pluto, and Ben Corio secured possession of a copy of an ancient map that he believed would guide him to Minanah.

With the modern interstellar drive, they had arrived at the small planet in weeks instead of years. They landed shortly before dawn, swooping over the moun-

tains until the altiscope showed this perfect landing spot on the edge of a tangled jungle of tall trees and twisting vines.

"Take a look out there," Corio grinned, his teeth flashing. "A virgin planet, all ours for the taking. What could a crowd of naked savages do with all this?" He turned to Nana, the smile deepening. "What do you think of Corio now, my fine lady? I told you I would find the Paradise Planet. Here it is, and if you want to make friends with me, you can wear diamonds and asthers in your hair."

"There is no proof that this is Minanah," she answered him bitterly. "There is nothing here but a dream that you have followed to your own distruction."

"There were fires on the other side of these mountains. I saw a city, a city lighted by artificial means. If these people are not hiding from the rest of the Universe, why hasn't the Federation heard of them? Ha! Answer me that!"

"There must be millions of inhabited planets that the Federation does not cover. I hope for the sake of the people in that city that this is not Minanah."

The man turned toward her angrily. "What do you know of life outside that hell-hole on Pluto? How do you know what money and power can do? Your old man must have been crazy, keeping a doll like you in that den of thieves!"

"My father was a better man than you will ever realize," she said, dully. "Somebody had to care for mad dogs like you after capital punishment was outlawed by the Federation."

The smile vanished and a snarl replaced it. He lifted his palm and took a step toward her. Vrkka growled, deep in his throat, and his red eyes gleamed. Sullenly, Corio glared at him, but he lowered his upraised hand. Nana shrank back, her hands clenched on the rough material of her overall.

Mike broke in, half angrily. "That is enough, Corio. We have plans to make, and we all need rest. We were at landing stations for the past twenty-four hours. It will be at least twelve hours before we can venture outside the ship into the exhaust area. We need fresh water and food."

"You are right, of course. There are no plans we can make until we have seen and studied the inhabitants. A lot of time has elapsed since they made their migration. If they are simple enough, we may be able to put ourselves over as gods coming from the heaven on wings of light. It has been done before, you know. If they do not want to listen to reason, this ship is armed to the teeth. I think we can take anything we want." Corio put one hand on

the metal ladder that led to his quarters, but he turned for a parting shot at Nana.

"If I ever catch you when Vrkka is not looking—" his oily voice left the sentence unfinished, but the threat hung in the air long after his figure had disappeared.

Vrkka motioned to a bunk with one three fingered hand. "Sleep," he commanded in his gutteral voice. Her frightened eyes darted to the opening where Corio had vanished. Following her glance with his own he spoke again. "Fear not. I will keep watch."

He seated himself on the other side of the cabin from her reclining figure. Carefully, he crossed his long legs before him. Wearily she closed her eyes and sought the blessed relief of sleep.

Across the blue hills, over the distant mountains, the insignificant white smoke signals were doing their work. Time after time they were seen and relayed, until the silent message reached the last sentry, holding his patient vigil on a plateau high above the Sacred city of the Golden Mountain.

The stalwart brave turned sharply, and whistled to his horse. She came obediently to his side, and he vaulted easily to her back. Digging moccasined heels into her flanks, he started down the twisting path to the plain below. During the descent, he scanned the familiar scene with practiced eyes.

Cultivated fields checker-boarded the valley below to the edge of the City itself. Wide roads led from the outskirts like the spokes of a giant wheel, converging at the foot of the small glittering cone that formed the hub of the wheel and the center of the City. It could not be called a mountain with any degree of accuracy, though the City derived its name from the golden pyramid. It was golden not only in color, but with the light that emanated from the gently sloping sides. It seemed to breathe as the glow increased and diminished like the respiration of a living organism. The top was cut off sharply, flattened, and surrounded by a railed platform that hid the source of the green glow that arose from the interior.

For some reason, that eerie glow seemed to alarm the lone, galloping sentry. His body flattened along the back of his speeding mount, his face growing tense and alarmed. The City drew nearer, as the dust rose behind the flying hooves that covered the ground so rapidly.

In one of the low-slung lodges that lined the straight streets of the City, a dark haired girl paused at her work, and shared the strange unease that was sweeping over them. Something was stirring in the bowels

of the planet, rumbling and seething angrily.

Narkeeta, the Little Flower, was puzzled. She walked lightly to a window, and parted the soft doeskin curtains that screened the interior of her father's lodge from the bright sunlight. Her lovely face, heart shaped under the thick bangs of blue black hair, turned upward toward the crater of the Golden Mountain. Outside her window, people were gathering in the streets, peering from doors and windows at the unusual activity.

The green glow rose higher, darkening the sky with its power. Specks of light, as bright as diamond dust, spit angrily through the mist.

The thunder of hooves diverted her attention to the lone horseman who dashed past the lodge, and disappeared in a cloud of dust. She recognized the huge figure of her lover— Rani, the Great Gray Warrier. She let the curtains fall sharply, obstructing the view. Her little feet carried her swiftly through the lodge, and she slipped through the door to join the rapidly gathering throngs that were filling the streets.

"What is it?" she called, to the first person she saw. "Why is the Green God stirring?"

"We know nothing, Little Flower. Rani has ridden into the City from the plateau. He went to Tumbo, in the Council Lodge. When he has reported, perhaps we will know."

The name of her lover made the sweet contours of her mouth even gentler, as she turned to seek him. Was he not the strongest, the bravest, the kindest man in all Minanah? And was she not the most fortunate of women to have the Great Gray Warrior as her promised husband?

His white flecked horse was the first thing she saw as she neared the Council Lodge. The lathered animal stood, ignored, his breath blowing bubbles from his tortured lungs. Narkeeta reached for it in dismay.

"For shame!" she cried. "Someone should care for this animal!"

Humbly, a tall boy standing in front of the waiting crowd stepped forward and took the bridle. "Your pardon, Narkeeta. We were excited. I did not think."

She flashed her remarkable smile at the youth, and he colored to the ears with pleasure, for Narkeeta was a universal favorite.

Suddenly the skins over the door of the Lodge were flung apart. Narkeeta turned, hungry for news. Chief Tumbo exited first, a handsome man still in the prime of his manhood. Rani followed, ducking his great shoulders with the familiarity of long experience. His muscles ripped smoothly under his bronze hide, and as his eyes met hers, he smiled.

Tumbo raised his hand unnecessarily for silence, and spoke in a voice that carried over the assembly.

"Friends, from the emptiness above us, strangers have come to Minanah. Their ship lies over the mountains to the east on the Great Plain of Tawana. We know nothing of their purpose in coming here. The children of Minanah fled long ago from persecution. Long have we been taught to hate and to dread the white man. We have found peace here. Under the auspices of the Great Spirit we have found freedom from evil.

"We know not what intentions these strangers have in landing their great craft on our world. We have never wanted contact with the worlds beyond the stars. Still we are not a cruel people. Our God protects us, yet we know that though it may punish, it will never kill. Nor can we expect to become a part of its greatness, if we do so. I think that one of us should go across the mountains to seek out these people and endeavor to determine their purpose. There is no one better fitted for the duty than the Great Warrior. I have given him permission to go.

"I know we all wish to speak to him, and to wish him luck on his journey. However, he has little time to say his farewells, and to seek the God's blessing. He goes by tunnel-boat, and if all goes well, he will return before the dawn. The Peace of the Spirit be unto you. I have spoken."

The roar of approbation that greeted his words left no doubt as to the widsom of his decision. The people parted respectfully as Rani saluted his chief and stepped to the side of his sweetheart. The eyes of the two young people met and mated, without the need of words. She slipped her little hand into his big one, and they made their way toward the Mountain.

She waited as he climbed the golden stairs to the apex of the pyramid. She did not watch him ascend, but cast her eyes downward respectfully until he returned.

"Something is wrong." She spoke quickly, for her heart knew this man, knew his moods, his very thoughts.

"I got my blessing." He spoke in a puzzled voice. "But I felt anger, a bit of fury, in the God's touch. I have never felt such a thing before."

"I am frightened, Beloved." Her hand was tense in his own. "If something should happen to you over the mountain, you could never come back alone to the Green God. Someone should go with you."

"Do not be afraid for me, Little Flower." His words were a caress. "If something should befall me there, the Green God will protect me. I have lived always by its

teachings."

"And you will return before the morning? Peace go with you. You know, more than any other, where my heart lies. If you were to perish without—" she shuddered.

"Foolish one!" he laughed gently. "There is no death save for the wicked. A man who lives in peace and dignity with his neighbors will never know the ignominity of death."

He slipped his arms about her, and she rested gratefully against his naked bosom, her ear above the thudding of his heart.

"Only remember, Gray Warrier, that if aught happens to you on the Great Plain of Tawana, I would not care even for the Glory of the Green Mist without your spirit by my side. For you are my life, dear Rani, and without you Narkeeta could not exist."

"Be silent. The things you say are murmurings of a lover's heart, and not spoken with a truthful tongue. You have my promise that I shall return to you before the dawn and perhaps the Great Spirit will bless our love at last. We have waited long. Tomorrow, we shall go again and stand before it. Now will you cease your old woman's talk?"

"Yes." She straightened, and her cheek brushed the cord about his shoulders that held the carefully embroidered quiver filled with arrows. She had worked long over that quiver, and Rani cherished it. She touched it with gentle fingers.

"A constant token of my love to bring you back to me. It is a shield to guard your strength. I will wait for you through the long night. Come back to me soon."

His hand covered hers on the quiver. "Your token never leaves my side," he whispered. He drew her to him gently, and kissed her sweet lips in farewell.

He was gone. She watched his disappearing figure through blurring vision. Angrily, she dashed the moisture from her eyes. A maiden of Minanah did not weep. Still, there was a dread tugging in her vitals, a permonition of disaster. That too, was a new experience for Narkeeta.

Minanah was not altogether the simple world that appeared on the surface. The people had no enemies, therefore no need of any but sporting weapons. They loved the simple life, living close to the land. There was plenty of game in the forests, and the clear streams abounded with fish. Nature provided them with their food, their shelter, their clothing. There was only one thing the citizens of Minanah needed desperately. That was rapid transportation. There was only one Green God, and no person on Minanah wanted to be out of reach of its enveloping arms. The end of a life

span faced every human. No man dreaded that day, but looked forward to eternal life when his spirit could merge with the spirits of all their ancestors in the body of the Green God. The scientists of Minanah had bent their efforts to that end. No man was too far from the Green God, even on the other side of the world. Gleaming tunnels honeycombed the planet, and silver tunnelboats whipped through them in a matter of minutes. From their beloved spirit enough power surrounded the planet to keep life in any of its children until they could reach its home. No man was so small or insignificant that his God was not aware of him individually. To be refused the solace of the Transfiguration at Life's End was the worst that could happen to a child of Minanah.

It was the tunnelboat that Rani planned to utilize on his trip to the Plain of Tawana. He would go through the mountains, instead of over them. The Gray Warrior, naked except for moccasins, breech clout, weapons, and simple beaded headdress, entered the tunnelboat entrance in the center of the city. He lowered himself into the bullet shaped cylinder and closed the sliding panel over his head.

The interior was simple. To the right of the control board there was a recessed cabinet that held medicines, bandages, and sedatives for those who might need help on their journey to the city. To his left was a similar cabinet, holding a recording device wherein a man in need could send a message to the City for help. There was a Sacred Guard on constant duty in every tunnelboat station. He it was who saw that a boat awaited always, for a call from a distant station. This was the first time a station had been left open; it would wait for the Warrior, and no other man could use it until his return.

He set the controls for the nearest station to his destination, and flicked a switch from waiting position to automatic.

The conveyance shot away from its base at the touch of his finger, vibrating slightly with the hum of power.

Only a short time elapsed before the silver car slid to a halt at its predetermined destination. It was a small station, inside the wood, and unused for such a long time that the opening was choked with scrub and twisted vine. Rani stepped on cat-like feet to the entrance and parted the foliage with careful hands. His trained senses soon told him that he was alone in the forest. Only then did he slip through the doorway, cautious to leave no sign of his movements. He might need the tunnelboat for rapid transportation back to the City.

He swung into the lowest

branches of the thick foilage above him, and climbed rapidly to the top of the tallest tree he could find. Swinging there, feeling the breeze ruffle the perspiration-damp hair at his neck, he peered toward the slope of the plain. He could see the gleaming strangeness of the alien craft over the treetops, spear-like against the noon-day sky.

It was easy to work his way through the tree tops once his sense of direction had been established. It was much easier than fighting his way through the tangled underbrush, for he dared not use an open game trail. He moved more carefully as he neared the plain. Now he could catch glimpses of the ship's metal hide through openings in his leafy surroundings. Not a twig stirred, nor a limb trembled as he inched his way as near as he dared to the ship. It lay sleeping, quiescent, in the same sun that made mottled bronze shadows on his mighty shoulders. There was no sign of life on the prairie, so the Gray Warrior chose a comfortable, leaf-shrouded crotch, and settled himself there patiently to wait.

There was a well defined game trail to his right ending at a water hole where the countless tracks in the soft dirt gave evidence of its popularity. A few moments were sufficient to discover that man had not used it—yet.

He winced as he saw the burned animal carcasses that ringed the blackened edges of the force field. Frightened little wild things, stampeding from a horror they could not understand into a flaming, invisible death. Even as he watched, a trembling rabbit found the courage to leave it burrow. It bounded easily across the silent plain. He heard it scream with a curiously human sound as it hit the invisible wall of the force field to fall, a living torch, in its tracks.

That was an easily learned lesson. He could make no approach to the aliens in safety, so he would wait for them to come to him.

The warm sun drifted lazily across the sky and still he waited. His keen glance missed nothing, but all remained still and deserted. Now and again a small animal, a bird, or a butterfly would hit the wall of force and instantly burst into flames. The wanton destruction spoke mutely of the character of the strangers in the ship. Not even beasts would kill so casually, with no need for food.

The shadows were long before the ship, and the world was darkening into dusk, when Rani straightened tensely in his cramped position. His alertness had been rewarded. The fireflies were dotting the evening with their orange light, and they were flying through the force field, safe within the danger zone. He rubbed his eyes to be sure they

were not playing tricks on him in the twilight. He was right. His acute sense of distance had not failed. The force field was off. Now maybe something would happen.

He did not have long to wait. Doors high on the ship's hull rasped open with a screech of metal, and a ladder extended its searching head toward the ground. Two human figures, swathed from head to foot in some foreign material, appeared and began to descend, gropingly. Each kept one hand near the strange weapons that swung at their sides. As the Gray Warrior had expected, they were searching for water. He was high above them, well screened from their eyes, but he had a perfect view of the waterhole beneath his lofty perch.

The strangers were nearing his hiding place now. One clutched the sleeve of the other to gain his attention, and pointed to the ripple of water that glinted through the trees. The other nodded, and lifting the strange weapon at his side, sprayed the surrounding brush with a pencil of violet flame. Rani saw the bushes shake and tremble, leaves blazing and falling to the ground beneath. The high pitched blam-blam-blam of the weapon echoed for a moment in the stillness. Rani found himself hoping that they would not think to spray the trees above with that evil force.

The taller of the two figures lifted his arms and carefully removed the covering about his head. The face that emerged was handsome, but etched with cruelty. The dark eyes flashed, and his thin lips parted in a smile.

"We are safe, Mike." He gestured, and his companion removed his helmet also. "The air is good, and here is the water. We have seen enough familiar game to know that we are in no danger of starving."

To his amazement, Rani found that he could understand the language. Though there were strange differences in usage and pronounciation, the basic tongue was the same as that his people had brought with them on their long ago migration from the stars.

The second of the two men was relieved to rid himself of the helmet. He breathed deeply of the evening air as he spoke bluntly. "There is still no evidence that this is Minanah. The entire story may be a fairy tale. I did not want to follow you on this crazy trip from the beginning. Please remember that. And for your health's sake let us hope this is Minanah. I will not believe it until I see paths paved with gold and studded with diamonds."

"Not hard to convince, are you?" The words were sarcastic, but Ben spoke with confidence as he continued. "You will see gold, uranium, tiason, jewels. Jimmy Drinkwater

was no fool, and I have his original map and description right here." He patted his shoulder pocket, and grinned. "Furthermore, it will stay here as long as I am your leader."

"What about the woman?" An eager whine entered Mike's voice. "If it were not for Vrkka, we could share the woman. Space makes a cold bedfellow, and we are a long time out of Pluto."

"I will attend to Vrkka, but all in good time. Until we have found and conquered the savages who claim this planet, we will need every man. It is getting dark, give Vrkka a buzz on your spacephone, and tell him to toss out some casks and join us with the woman. I want to be loaded and ready for blast-off by dawn. I would like to take the ship over the mountain by daylight for a look at that city. I need to know what we are up against."

Mike was casting nervous glances over his shoulder. "It is getting dark. There is something spooky about this place. I feel something watching us. A thousand eyes boring into my back. Let us go back to the ship and help with the casks."

Silently, Rani drew further into his place of concealment. To his relief, Corio laughed at his companion. "You old woman," he taunted. "Strike a light and we will go back to join the others. Better put your helmet back on your shoulders. We will be safer in the protection of our suits as long as we are outside."

Rani drew a sigh of relief as he saw the two withdraw toward the ship, a beam of light guiding their footsteps. He had learned more than he had hoped to learn, and without revealing himself. He could hardly distinguish the figures on the darkening plain, and it was hours before the twin moon rise. Rou would not enter the heavens for some time, and Garou would be even later in casting his golden light over the planet. There might even be darkness all through the night, for the sky was overcast as though in mourning for the planet in jeopardy. Rani made no effort to deceive himself as to danger that confronted his people. These men, in their armoured vessel, with their terrible weapons, could easily overcome the entire planet. One ship against a world! But what a helpless world—child-like in trust and innocence, with no conception of the horrors of war.

His jungle trained eyes penetrated the night, spotting the two figures who joined the men called Mike and Ben Corio at the foot of the ladder. Up they went, and down, bringing the casks for the needed water. Though moisture could be reclaimed in space, there was a nominal amount of loss. A

spaceman's life depended greatly upon his water supply. Too, if there were to be a siege, the water would be needed—water, and food.

Rani knew that he should return immediately with the small store of information he had gathered, but still he lingered. Maybe he could discover how many men were within that gigantic bullet. He had seen two men, heard them speak of a woman, and a man called Vrkka. There were four figures working about the ship now. There might be more—many more. He needed to know if the crew came alone, or if there were an armada waiting in the atmosphere above to join them.

As he watched, there was a visible brightening of the scene. Rani rubbed his eyes in unbelief, but it was true. The hills were turning golden, and the first eerie tinkling of a musical wind reached his ears. The world grew brighter still, and he heard Mike's hoarse scream. Rani cowered from the frightening thing that followed. For the first time in his life, Rani was afraid.

Back in the City of the Golden Mountain, the day had been a strange and trying one for the Little Flower. After she had kissed her lover good-bye, she tried to busy herself about her tasks as any proper maiden should do, but her mind wandered and her hands were clumsy. Her thoughts were with her Gray Warrior on his unprecedented pilgrimage to the Plain of Tawana. What had happened to the serenity of her well-ordered existence? She had never feared for her lover before. There were dangers in the deep wood, but her warrior could cope with any ordinary danger. Even though he were hurt in some encounter with a wild beast, the Great Spirit would keep life in his body until he could be brought back to its healing strength. If these strangers were like the old legends, they came to defile her land, to maim and destroy. She tried to force her thoughts into more proper channels. This way lay madness.

The God of the Green Mist grew more restless as the day waned and the sun sank low. No person in the City could be calm under the awful unrest that seethed above them. Narkeeta had implicit faith in her God. It would protect its chosen people—but why, oh why, was it so restless and alarmed?

At dusk she finally gave way to her emotions, and forgot all thoughts of work. She slipped a jeweled scarf over her shoulders to guard against the cool of the evening, and walked outside into the empty streets. Everybody was gathered by the council fires that burned at the base of the Golden Mountain. Their light was paled

by that of the Mountain itself. The green glow poured upward from its summit. Beneath it, the people were silent, unnaturally silent for such a large gathering. She noticed uneasily that the Sacred Guards were out in force, stationed at each ascending stairway. Their position had always been an honorary one, for Narkeeta never remembered seeing them at their posts save at ceremonies and feasts. No man had ever been barred from his diety.

She passed Tumbo, sitting cross-legged on the ground. He was dressed in his ceremonial robes, his face turned upward with the rest of the multitude that watched and waited. She continued to walk, slowly, toward the Eastern steps that led upward to the cradle of the Spirit. The tall guard barred the way with outstretched spear. Apologetically, he looked at the lovely face of the Little Flower.

"No one goes above until the God returns to rest."

"But the Green God would not harm one of us!" she answered in protest. "It will only protect, and never harm. I seek peace for my heart. It is sore with fear for Rani."

"We will not approach the Spirit in its present state of unrest. Even the dying must wait, tonight." He gestured, and Narkeeta's eyes followed his motion. Two stretchers were placed, side by side, near the Mountain. Both the invalids were women, both very ancient and obviously breathing their last. Sunken lips parted over toothless gums, respiration was weak and irregular. Yet their eyes were fastened on the top of the mountain with no dread or fear, only sublime happiness and a sort of eager impatience.

"But this is cruel!" Narkeeta's eyes clouded. "To make them wait so when their time of eternal peace has come!"

"The Green God will keep their lives intact until the crisis is past."

Narkeeta turned and walked blindly away. She did not stop at the beds of the dying, for they needed no comfort. They had reached that ultimate time for which all lives were lived. She felt no pity, only a vague envy. She knew her time would come, as it did to all good people of Minanah.

She was nearing the solemn figure of Tumbo when it happened. She had grown accustomed to the sound of the God's stirring, and she had not noticed the steady increase in the sound of its anger. She saw Tumbo spring to his feet, and a wave of sound swept the assembly as every face turned upward.

It was an awesome sight. She had never seen the God save as whirling beauty in its golden cradle, rising only to welcome one who had ended his mortal span, or to bless a marriage or a new born

child. The god rose. The energy that formed its being was visible only as a spiraling nebula of green mist, with sparklets of light like diamonds crowning its beauty. It whirled faster and faster, and as it rose, a musical wind rose with it, singing and sighing and sobbing. It began to move away from its cradle, high above the heads of its people.

Tumbo's voice could be heard clearly in the frightened stillness. "Not since the days of our fathers has the Green God left his resting place!" Awe was present in his words. "Surely this must be some great thing to call it forth again!"

The entire populace of the City watched the God on his trip across the heavens. It disappeared, slowly, over the mountains, leaving the memory of its light in the clouded sky, and the golden glow of its passage lingered on the land below.

Tumbo saw tears in the eyes of the Little Flower. Tenderly he lifted her face and raised it until he could look into her heart.

"Why do you weep, Narkeeta?"

"It is a day of bad omen. I fear, Tumbo . . . I fear for the Gray Warrior."

"Trust the Great Spirit, child. It will return, and with it, peace."

She bowed her head, submissively.

This was the awe-inspiring sight that had struck fear into the heart of Rani, far across the mountain. A God of love and peace could be a frightening thing on a mission of vengeance. There was no doubt of its intention. The shapeless majesty hovered over the interlopers and their ship, the mist of which it was composed whirling so rapidly that the sound of its movement was a great screaming of force and wind. The puny humans below shrieked and cringed in terror at the horror above them. They milled about helplessly, impotently scrambling to escape this fearful unknown.

The level ground beneath the ship began to heave and crack, rising beneath the exerted force of the monstrous God, striving to overthrow the man made vessel. The seams of the ship creaked and buckled as the contour of the land changed beneath it, and with a roar of defiance it crashed to its side and settled into the awful hole that opened to receive it.

The tiny figures of the crewmen scrambled madly for safety. The wind tore at them, the ground was opening beneath their feet. From the nose of the ship came a burst of flame, as circuits were shorted and fused by the impact. The landing wings gave up their metal covering in sheets that ripped away and exposed the bare skeleton of steel beneath.

One of the crewmen, unidentifiable in his smothering space suit, had found his way to the forest's edge. Rani sat, stunned by the enormity of the awful sight he was witnessing. He heard the man stumbling, crashing, through the underbrush until the sound of his flight was lost in the vastness of the uncharted jungle.

The whirling diminished, subsided, with the God's accomplished revenge. The wrecked ship lay half submerged in the soil it had come to rob. Great rocks had been vomited up from the tortured chasms, and smoke rose in sulphuric wisps from the torn bosom of the land. Sated, the God who could not kill twisted away back over the mountain to the cradle that awaited it. It had evened the odds for its people. Now they must finish the battle alone.

The three remaining crewmen did not wait to witness the departure of the Spirit. They had broken for the shelter of the woods when the wrath had subsided. None of them, however, had run with the abject terror of the first, who had disappeared, screaming with fright, into the trackless jungle. Once in that matted wilderness, it would take a woodsman of Rani's caliber to find his way out again.

The three seemed to realize that fact. They paused in the shelter of the first overhanging branches, and looking behind them, saw that they were safe. The God was gone. The plain had been changed in that area to a mess of volcanic rubble, and their ship lay wrecked in the center of the fiasco.

The thing that had come out of the night was gone, but the plain and the surrounding hills still glowed faintly with the strange light that the exerted force of the monster seemed to have left in its wake. It was an odd sight—the ground itself glowing with its own inner light.

All three of the strangers wrenched at their helmets with almost one motion. Rani had changed his hiding place, slipping through the trees like a flickering shadow in the night, above their heads. He watched the faces with interest, as they emerged into the night.

He knew one of them. Mike. The second gave Rani a start. He had never seen a human face like this one. Three red eyes blinked above slits of nostrils, in a face out of a nightmare. It was the color of long dead flesh, a moldy gray. This man was not from any world he knew.

Still. it was the third face that impressed him the most. A mass of golden hair tumbled from the confines of the globe-like helmet. This was a type of woman Rani had never seen before. Fair of skin, eyes as blue as the sky on a spring day, and hair as golden as the sun. His

eyes were accustomed to the dark beauty of the Indian maidens, but this was a golden goddess.

Or a golden demon. Her first act was to hrink against the hideous monster. She swayed, and would have fallen, but the creature placed one long arm about her slender waist in support.

It had been Corio, then, brave Corio, who had cracked under the strain and run madly into the jungle. Rani was surprised. He would have expected it to be the pudgy Patton.

"What happened?" the girl was asking. "What was that awful thing?"

"It was either a weapon or an unfamiliar life form." Vrkka answered. "It had a form of intelligence. It was seeking us."

"A curse on Corio for his brilliant ideas! Can the ship be repaired?" Mike spoke angrily.

"It may be possible. As soon as we are sure we will not be visited by that thing again, we can take a look at the damage. I suggest you buzz Corio on your spacephone. The last I saw of him he was still wearing his helmet. His only chance to find us again is for us to guide him by signal-strength."

"Brave Corio!" The girl spoke scornfully. "Running away like a rabbit saving his own precious skin. I hope he never gets back!"

"Silence, Nana," Vrkka said in his gutteral voice. "Your own skin depends upon our sticking together now. We have a common enemy. This was a foolish venture, and I would never have come with you if there had been any planet in the Federation where I could have found sanctuary. If we cannot repair the ship, we may be here the rest of our lives. Beautiful this planet may be, but it is a little simple for my taste. I have been in tight spots before, and I have always found a way out if I looked long enough. You, Mike—call Corio. We will need his help."

Vrkka deliberately turned his back to them and walked to the forest's edge. By the glowing light left by the departing creature, he tried to calculate the damage to their craft with practiced eyes. The realization was creeping upon Mike that they were marooned, helpless without their ship. Vrkka seemed to be ursurping leadership in the absence of Corio, and Mike's hatred had been simmering within him for weeks. It might take months to repair the ship. Now Vrkka was the only thing that stood between him and the possession of the woman he craved so intensely.

His eyes narrowed into cunning slits of evil, as he loosed the flame gun in the holster by his side. The woman stood listless, drained of all energy. Shock had piled upon shock until her body had rebelled

and she was incapable of motion. He watched the pulse jumping in her white throat, and ran his tongue over suddenly dry lips. Rani, still patiently spying from above, had no idea of Mike's intention when the gun appeared like magic in his hairy fist.

The weapon leaped in his hand, spat purple flame across the clearing. A smoking hole appeared between the Martian's shoulders, a hole large enough to hold Rani's clenched fists. There was no seepage of body fluid, for the intense heat had cauterized as it blasted through the flesh.

Vrkka never knew what had happened.

The woman screamed. Wild, piercing screams that held hysteria and approaching insanity. Mike smiled, his fat lips curling in satisfaction. The screaming pleased him. He liked to hear women scream. He would make her scream again and again this night. But he must be careful. He must not kill this one, as he had the others. There was no one yet, to take her her place.

The screaming hardly penetrated Rani's consciousness. He was sick. He had seen death. The death of a man, of a living creature with a soul. Death with no peace or happiness—Death that left a man's body lying on the floor of the jungle, for the scavengers and the ants and the worms. It was not good that man should see death. It put a blight on his soul. Even the rare criminals on Minanah were sent far into the bowels of the planet to die, and then only if they had been rejected without question by the Spirit. This was intolerable. A vision of horror.

Mike had the woman now. He carried her, kicking and screaming, over his shoulder. His destination was the wrecked hull of the ship. It would furnish protection and a kind of shelter. Later he would seek Corio. Now he would have the woman. His feet slipped and slid in the darkness on the uneven ground, but his strength was easily superior to that of the frail girl.

A low growl of anger rose in Rani's throat, boiling through the sickness and the taste of bile. This creature was the monster, not Vrkka. He would witness no more of the creature's evil this day. His supple body slipped to the ground, and he started in pursuit of the fleeing shadows.

As he ran, he reached for an arrow and fitted it to his bow without breaking his stride. The distance decreased between them with astonishing rapidity.

The girl had seen him. She stopped struggling. Now she was gazing at him with the look of a hunted

deer. The fool! Weakly, she cried out to him, warning Mike at the same time. "Help me! Oh, please help me!"

At the sound of her words Mike threw her to the ground in one motion and wheeled in his tracks. The gun appeared in his hand so rapidly that Rani did not see him reach for it. The Gray Warrior looked death in the face for the second time that day. Still it was with reluctance that his bow twanged, and his arrow spel true to its mark.

He never saw his missle hit its target. He did not even hear the *blam* as Mike released the flame. Something hit his side with a stunning impact, spun him half around before he fell into blackness.

Narkeeta's face was pinched and wan in the early morning light. The council fires had burned low, and so had the vitality of the people still scattered here and there about them. Most of the crowd had gone home to sleep after the Great Spirit had returned and gone to rest. The spirits of the dying had been accepted, and the stretchers had been taken away.

High on the mountain ledges, the eternal sentries kept watch. Word had come of the destruction of the alien ship, but not news of its occupants, or Rani.

The sun rose high in the heavens. The Little Flower waited. When it had risen above the mountains she rose without a word and walked to the nearest stairway that led to the crest of the Mountain. This time there was no Sacred Guard to bar her way. She made a forlorn, lonely little figure as she ascended to the summit.

The God was at rest. She clasped the golden rail and looked downward into the eternal movement of the Mist. Her heart longed to be comforted.

"Give me peace, Spirit of my Fathers," he whispered. "Assure me that my love is safe."

She waited confidently for the gentle touch of the Mist. It came, a writhing, transparent pseudopod. She felt the communion, opened her heart to it. There was comfort in the nearness, but no reassurance. Her eyes opened wide with shock as she felt the God's withdrawal. All was not well with her lover! Pain, disbelief, horror struggled within her for supremacy. Helplessly, she clutched for the departing Mist.

"Come back," she cried, through a suddenly constricted throat. "Come back and give me a blessing on my journey, for I must go to find him!"

Almost sorrowfully, the Mist swirled below her standing place, but it did not rise to offer the expected blessing. The God knew

things never granted to mortal man. It was not safe for her to seek Rani. The God could offer no protection for her. Rebellion rose in the girl's mind, springing from the alarm in her heart. She heard her own words with horror as she spoke to the God as she had never spoken before.

"Then you have deserted me and all of your people. You have forsaken Rani, who loved you! I demand that you send me to him! I have never disobeyed you before. Rise! Rise, I say!"

The tempo of the God's movement increased perceptively, as though it were wounded by her thoughtless words. Yet it made no effort to give her an answer. Wild anger boiled the blood in the veins of the distressed maiden, half insane with fear for her lover.

"Then you are a false God," she whispered sibilently. "I shall go without your blessing. I disobey you, Cruel Spirit, I deny you, for you have denied the Warrior! I go to find him, and to complete his mission if he is unable to do so. Then I will come back, and you can send me into the deepest pits of the mountains to die. I can not leave him possibly wounded and alone!"

She turned, and ran wildly from the stairs, away from the face of her God. Rani's promises were never broken. He would have kept his word and returned by the dawn if he were able to return at all. She ignored the small voice within her that whispered painfully, "What have you done? No mere man is worth your denying the all-wise Spirit! You have lost your hope of paradise!"

"Rani is worth anything," she answered the whispering voice, shouting mentally until she heard it no more. "Even though I die and he lives, it is better than this agony of soul. The God forsook me in my hour of greatest need. I do what I must."

Deliberately she prepared for her journey. The doeskin raiment was cast aside for buckskin. Her hair she plaited and wound about her small head. Off went her jewelry. An ornament might reflect sunlight. When her preparations were completed, she went to speak to her father.

The old man listened to her words in silence. He loved his only child. Her words were torn from her with agony. She told him what she felt she must do. She omitted only one thing. The fact that the God had denied his blessing must not be known. While her father would worry about her, he would be sure of her safety if he thought she did not walk alone.

"It is obvious that Rani has been captured," she finished. "You know that I am as safe in the

jungle as I am here in your lodge. It is possible that a woman might succeed on such a mission where a man would fail. Will you tell Tumbo what I plan to do? He would never agree, if I asked him before I left."

"There are warriors here who can go to effect Rani's release. This is not the duty of a woman. Even now the chief gathers a war-party to go to the rescue of the Warrior."

"No!" Narkeeta's face blanched. "If he is a captive, he might be killed if they are attacked. You must stop them. Get me twenty-four hours, Father—and I will report to you. We do not want the blood of our people shed. We know nothing of war. Give me a chance, Father, please. Tumbo will have to listen to you if I am already gone."

The face of her father showed the lines of age and defeat. "What says the Spirit to your venture?" It was his last defense.

"All is well with the Spirit." Narkeeta surprised herself with the glibness of the first lie that had ever passed her lips.

"If it is the will of the Spirit, I can say no more." He surrendered, unhappily.

The unhappy girl, guilty of insubordination and untruth, felt her sins lie heavy on her shoulders. She trembled inwardly at the graveness of her crime. Still, she had done it all for Rani, and Rani was helpless and in trouble somewhere over the mountains. She knew she was going into awful danger, because the Spirit was not walking by her side. She felt the new aloneness deep within her, but the importance of her mission drugged the realization of what she had done. Until she had found Rani, there would be no time for penitence.

Nana had given up hope when she saw Mike murder the Martian. The inevitable climax she so dreaded was upon her. The awful eyes of the pervert had seemed to glow like an animal's as he came toward her in the darkness. She felt herself lifted and borne toward the wrecked ship. Still she fought, screamed, railed against the fate that waited. It was with disbelief that she saw the faint outline of the naked savage who had dashed from the darkness of the jungle and was running swiftly after them, a primitive bow and arrow in his hands. She had no fear of the savage. Anything was better than the monster who carried her. This creature had to be a savior. Weakly, she collapsed, using the dregs of her strength in a last call for help.

The breath was knocked from her body as Mike threw her roughly to the ground. Through the haze of suffocating heaving to

renew the oxygen in her lungs, she saw and smelled the flash of the flame gun. It was minutes before she could crawl weakly to her knees and look about her.

The faint glow left by the departing mist-monster gave her some visibility. The fat figure of Mike lay crumpled, a barbed shaft protruding from his chest. His pale blue eyes were open, meeting death with a fish-like glare Shuddering, she turned away and sought the savage who had killed him. The pale splotch against the dark earth finally caught her eyes, and she staggered toward it. The flame gun had torn a jagged hole in the side of the savage. She saw the darkness of the jungle before her. Nothing lay there but the danger of wild beasts, the unknown fate of the lost Corio, and the mutilated body of Vrkka. The ship would be her only refuge. Though flame still darted now and again from the nose of the vesssel, it could not burn. It would be shelter, at least.

She looked again at the unconscious figure of the man. He had tried to save her, and she could not desert him on this lonely plain. She tried to lift him, but his size was enormous. Looking about her in desperation, she realized that there was no way to move him with her frail strength. Quickly, she examined his wound. Wth proper treatment, he would recover.

The roar of a giant cat came from the woods. The wild life was starting its nocturnal prowling, and the night was growing cool. She had to do something. With the need for decisive action, strength came back to her trembling legs. She ran lightly toward the ship, over the uneven ground. There was no entrance problem, now that the ship lay prostrate. The opening to the air lock was only a foot or so from the ground, and the door swung open crookedly on twisted hinges. It was the work of a moment to secure a heavy blanket and run back to the limp form of the native.

It was difficult to roll his dead weight onto the blanket. As she turned his body, she caught sight of a beautifully embroidered quiver that hung over his shoulder. It had been ruined by the fire blast. The bottom was burned away, the arrows melted at the tip. She loosened it, threw it aside. His bow she saved, for he might need it. Then she tied the blanket about him and began the difficult task of dragging the man to the ship. She passed Mike's body with averted eyes, then paused. The stranger would need weapons if they were to survive, and his arrowheads had been ruined in the blast. In revulsion, she turned to the body. She secured the flame gun, then, gritting her-

teeth, pulled at the protruding arrow in his chest. She winced as she heard the withdrawing arrowhead grate against bone. One arrow might be better than none, for she had never used a flame gun, and she knew the native had not.

Later, Nana could never believe that she had carried the man into the ship. It was a nightmare of pulling, straining, muscles, of heart-breaking effort. Strange sounds of the night issued from the jungle, and her way was lighted only dimly by the decreasing light from the ship. At last he was safely within the hull, and through the air lock. She left him lying in the main cabin, while she secured the outside door. It screeched and protested, but eventually it closed, shutting out the sound of the jungle.

The man moaned harshly, and stirred. She had time for only a cursory glance at him before she reached for a fire extinguisher and dashed for the rosy glow that came from the region of the control room. It made her ill to see the twisted maze of glowing wires, the smashed control board. The room was still a mass of spitting, hissing fire, but it was soon under control. The blackness came as a welcome relief.

The ship was equipped with emergency light, each compartment having its own little power plant. She prayed that the one in the main cabin would be undamaged as she returned to the injured man. A sob caught in her throat as she pressed the switch, and the cabin was miraculously flooded with light. Now, at last, she got her first good look at the savage.

His chisled features were twisted with pain beneath the tangled locks of night-black hair. His body was bronze, superbly proportioned. She reached for the emergency kit of medicines automatically. He would be in great pain with returning consciousness. Luckily, she had treated many wounds of every description on Pluto. She sprayed the fine needle of sedative into the great muscle of his arm, and watched carefully as he relaxed and the grimace of pain disappeared from his mouth.

With deft fingers she probed, cleaned, treated the inflamed tissue. She was so absorbed in her work that she did not notice his steady brown eyes as they opened and he observed her ministrations. The look in his eyes was impenetrable, wary through the drug, but he moved not a muscle.

Nana was fascinated. The migration had been no myth, but a reality. Here, before her eyes, was the descendent of an almost prehistoric Earthman. An intelligent species of man who had never heard of the Federation! What a wealth of history, of legend, lay

behind him! What a story to tell if she ever saw the civilized world again!

The last pad was in place, and she sprayed the wound with plastic skin. Only then did she feel his eyes upon her, and she turned slowly to meet them.

Say what you will, every man has known what it is to look for the first time into the eyes of a stranger, and find there a deep attraction and an affinity that has no explanation. Such a thing happened now to Nana and Rani. Without ever having spoken a word, something material fused and was formed between them. It was made not only of attraction, but of something deep within them that had been searching always for the thing they now found in the other.

"How do you feel?" She spoke the words slowly, never dreaming that he would understand.

"I have been wounded." He was surprised at the clumsiness of his tongue, finding it difficult to speak through the haze of sedative. "Where did you bring me?"

"To the ship. It was the only place. You saved my life, you know."

"The fat man!" Rani tried to lift himself upon one elbow. "Where is he?"

"You killed him. You did the universe a favor. He was inhuman."

Rani sank back, eyes glazed. "I created death. May the Great Spirit forgive me."

"You must rest. Lie quietly here. You must not move about." Competently, she brought more blankets, and put a pillow under his head. She wrapped him warmly, in preparation for the awful fever that she knew would come. It was beginning now, with the characteristic chill and shattering of the teeth.

The fever rose rapidly, once it had started, to the point of delerium. She watched over him carefully, working to abate its rise. He spoke no more until the actual onslaught of delerium. She heard his words with only half her senses, but she gathered that he had been sent by his people to discover the purpose for which the ship had come to Minanah. He spoke wildly of a Great Green God who seemed to be the deity of his people. He voice grew sweet and gentle as he spoke of someone he called the Little Flower, and begged the god to protect her.

He must have been watching them in the forest, for he spoke of the men, and of her, Nana. He raved about the beautiful goddess whose hair shone like the golden sun.

It amazed her that a man of his proved bravery and unusual strength would be so terrified of death. In the worst of the fever, the thought of death haunted him,

filled his overwrought mind with terror. He spoke of Vrkka and Mike with agony and reproach. He was not a coward, certainly. There was much to learn of this man and his way of life.

She kept up the lone vigil until the fever began to abate. She knew it would not return if she could keep him warm. There was no heat on the hulk, and the night was cold. Through the cracked and twisted surface plates the wind sent searching fingers, and she found herself shivering. The unfamiliar noises of the night were almost blanketed from her hearing, and only once did she start in fright as the roaring rose to a cresendo. It seemed that the denizens of the night must be locked in mortal combat on the other side of the ship's metal wall. She fought down nausea as she realized what they must be fighting over. There would be little left of Mike's body by the dawn.

The scrambling confusion disturbed her patient also. He roused, and began to tremble with the approach of another chill. With sudden decision, she stripped off her suit and slipped beneath the blankets by his side. She wrapped her arms about him and slowly, the warmth of her body began to penetrate and drive away the chill. Through the long night she held him so, while the animals screamed over the body of the dead man outside. This man had become a symbol of all humanity to her, and she must keep the spark of life intact in his body. All life had become nothing but a struggle to keep death from the man at her side.

The dawn came at last, driving the beasts from the grisly remains on the prairie, and laying cold fingers on the world. She was stiff and cramped in her awkward position, but the man would recover now. Life ebbed low in the darkness before the dawn, but sunlight always brought renewed strength and vigor. She had won.

The man's eyes opened, quickly, with no advance warning. They were lucid, now, after the delirium. To her surprise, he shrank from her touch, avoiding her. Embarrassed, she rose from her position at his side, and rearranged the coverings.

His voice was weak, terribly weak. She wished she could read the message in his eyes as he whispered, "What are you called, woman of the golden hair?"

"Nana. And your name?"

"Rani." He did not add his personel appellation of Gray Warrior. That was a name for friends and loved ones. Ths woman was an enemy. She had saved his life to trick him with her beauty, and make him a traitor to his people. It was obvious that she employed witchcraft, for how else could she

have wormed her way into his emotions so easily? She had come with the terrible men. It stood to reason that she was one of them. Weakness turned his giant sinews to water. He could hardly speak, and certainly he could not escape—not yet.

"Tell me," he whispered. "How came you here, and why?"

She told him, sparing herself nothing. She sat there, in the cold blue morning light, and poured her story into the listening ears, the first sympathetic ears she had found since the horror began. Once or twice her voice trembled, but she did not cry. The pathos of her situation was made more evident in her attempted bravery. The man lay unmoving, watching her with steady eyes until she finished her story.

She was still under his searching eyes for a few minutes before he spoke. She did not know what to expect. Sympathy, perhaps, at the least understanding. Certainly not the words that came, stronger that any he had uttered before.

"Lies!" The words burst forth from their prison. "How can anyone so beautiful lie so well?"

She gasped in astonishment, shrank back in unbelief, as he continued. "You came to Minanah of your own free will. You forget that I spied on your fellows in the wood, that I heard them speak. Why came you to Minanah, I ask you? Tell me truth!"

"I told you why they came. I was an unwilling captive. Have you never heard of a hostage, of a person put in a position not of his own choosing? You must believe me!"

"There is nothing comparable on my land to these things I hear you speak. You would have done better to have let me die. If you think to use me, to trick me into betraying my people out of pity for you, you think falsely. The Green God has proved your wickedness by wrecking your ship. How many more wait in the skies above?"

"There were only the four of us. I swear it. Can you not see that I want to help you? Would I have told you of the ship's purpose if I were one with them? There is only one of them left. Ben Corio. Once you find him and destroy him you will be in no danger."

"Except from you." He turned his head away from her, and closed his eyes. The vision came again to him of the hideous Martian who had held this woman in his arm. The thought sickened him, hurt him in a way he did not understand. The ways of the other worlds were not his way. His ancesters had done well to leave them.

Nana's eyes brimmed with tears. Wordlessly she turned away, un-

happy thoughts keeping her company as she searched among the tumbled stores for nourishment. There were several cans of riah blood broth still clinging to their magnetized shelf, so she looked no further. She opened them with the handle of the attached spoon. By the time she had threaded her way back to the compartment where Rani lay, the heat unit had done its work, and both cans were steaming. The aroma reached Rani's nostrils, and made him realize how ravenous he was. To his surprise, he found that he did not have the strength to feel himself. Again he was indebted to the woman, for she fed him slowly, like a child, before she touched her own food. The broth warmed his belly, gave him strength. She wiped his mouth, gently, and turned to her own repast without speaking. She watched him as she ate, her hair falling child-like about her shoulders. Gratitude vied with natural repulsion in his mind. What did she hope to gain, by saving him, lest it be informaton or betrayal of his people for her sake? She was tired. Her eyes were heavy, and she nodded once or twice, but each time she jerked herself erect with an effort.

"How long have I been here?" Rani asked curtly. He had no idea that more than a few hours had elapsed since he had been wounded.

"The day is here, and the sun is high in the heavens." Unconsciously, Nana had adopted his own stilted phrasology. Rani felt a sickening lurch in his stomach. He had to get back to the City! Again he tried to lift himself, but found that he could not. Nana looked at him quickly, he thought triumphantly.

"You cannot leave. A flame gun wound, though it heals rapidly when properly treated, leaves you in a condition of shock. Lie quietly, for only sleep and rest will renew your strength."

He raged inwardly as she bathed him and attended to his natural desires. The Great Gray Warrior, helpless in the hands of a woman! But what a woman!

Once she had finished, he lay warm and comfortable in his cocoon, drowsy under the sedative she again administered. The problems he knew were so important faded into unreality. He watched her as she set about straightening what she could of the place, womanlike. His mental barriers were down. She was a beautiful and desirable woman, and both the City and Narkeeta seemed far away. He saw her prepare a bed for herself not many feet away. He wished she would lie down beside him as she had the preceeding night. His eyes closed. He could feel her smooth hand, soft and fragrant on his fore-

head. He slept.

Nana was groggy with exhaustion. Later there would be time to plan, to persuade Rani that she spoke the truth. That mattered to her terribly. She, Nana Anders, product of a modern refinement and galactic culture, found the opinion of this savage of the utmost importance. The memory of his honest eyes went with her into slumber.

Narkeeta had never seen death until she came upon the murdered Vrkka. Even the animals had not bothered his unearthly carcass. She shuddered in horror at the gaping hole in his body. This creature was one of the strangers, but no weapon created upon Minanah had made that death wound. She looked with nausea at the three red eyes, staring into hers, the slitted nostrils filled with congealing green fluid. The sagging gray-white flesh filled her with loathing and disgust.

She looked beyond him at the crippled ship. The Green God had done its work well. At the thought of the God, her mind cringed, and turned to Rani. He must be here, somewhere. Her forest-trained eyes scouted the terrain, swiftly. What was that glint of color between the forest and the ship? She climbed lithely to the waiting branches of a nearby tree. Now she had a good view of the uneven ground, could look down upon the object she had seen.

By the Great Green God! What was that grisly mess smeared about the spot of color her eyes sought? She recognized it now, and her mind recoiled from the horror of that recognition. It was Rani's quiver, the quiver she had made for him, the quiver that never left his side.

Gone was fear, dread, caution. Gone was everything but the necessity to put her hands upon that quiver, to verify the truth of what she had seen. Scrambling downward, running wildly, she broke from the cover of the woods. Let the aliens see her, blast her, kill her, she would reach that evidence of Rani.

There was nothing recognizable in the torn and mangled remnants of flesh and bone that were scattered about the plain. Part of the body had been carried away by the flesh-eaters, the skull crushed by gaping jaws. Reluctantly, she stooped and lifted the damaged quiver in her hands. She saw the arrows it had held, scattered ruined, about her feet. They had killed him. Even the Green God could not help the torn thing that lay here.

Dry-eyed, she stared with burning hate at the fallen ship. Vengeance would be hers. Hatred such as she had never known welled

within her. She was not sorry now that she had defied the God. It had blessed Rani, and sent him forth —to this. She no longer cared for her own safety, or the salvation of her soul. She could never join her spirit with that of Rani in the after-life. With her vengeance, she might save her people. That was the only thing she had left out of a life that had been so perfect only yesterday.

The ship was a dead thing. It could have no inhabitants, or they would have given evidence of their presence. She would examine it well, and then search for a trail leading into the forest. Narkeeta knew she could track them down, for she had learned woodcraft at the side of the Warrior.

She looked a last time at the body before her. She had never heard of burial. Anyway, the spirit was gone, and it was the spirit that had been the essence of Rani, not the blood and bone.

There was evidence of torn fabric about the scene, a fabric the like of which Narkeeta had never seen. Someone had fought here with the Warrior. Someone who had been dragged away to the ship, for the trail was plain. They would not have gone to that trouble for Rani. The blasted quiver, with the bottom burned away spoke for itself. A living Rani would never have forsaken the quiver, ruined or otherwise. It was a symbol to them both.

She examined the ship from all sides. There was such a wealth of footprints, that she could not determine the number of creatures who had inhabited it. There was no sound, no means of egress. She was wasting her time here. She might have better luck in the jungle. She could track them until she found them, or at least found the end of their trail.

She did not look again at the evidence of Rani's passing from the realm of man. The quiver she carried with her as she followed the spoor across the plain.

It was easier than he had imagined. The forest spoke to the Little Flower, yielded its secrets gladly. The men were stupid. They must have been in wild flight when they entered the brush. She followed the trail easily, a wild trail that used no sense of direction, crossing and recrossing itself. What manner of creatures were these who could not find their way in a place which was as familiar to Narkeeta as the streets of the City?"

She found the place where he had paused to rest. For the spoor was plain before her now, and she realized it was only one man she was following. It was incredable that one man could have left a trail so large, but it was true. The broken branches, the dangling

vines, the scraped bark, would have indicated several men, and those running in fear. Still, she was finding his footprints regularly, and they were always of the same lone man.

Narkeeta grew weary as the trail doubled back upon itself again and again. He had obviously been lost, but how any reasoning creature could be lost with his trail so plain before him was ridiculous.

She smelled the smoke of his fire long before she came upon him. The fool must have finally decided to make camp, and rest before continuing. He had left himself wide open for attack. She was within thirty feet of him, and he never realized it.

With a shock, she saw that he was a man like other men. She had thought they would all be monstrous creatures like the Martian. His hair and eyes were black, his skin as dark as that of her own people. His face was covered by a stubble of hair, however. On Minanah, beards were unknown. It made him even more animal-like in the girl's opinion.

His eyes were red-rimmed. He crouched by the fire, looking about him in fright. A rabbit carcass was broiling, blackened, on a spit above his fire. He was clutching a globe-like thing with an opening in one side, and his fingers manipulated small switches as he spoke in a voice grown hoarse with constant repetition.

"Come in, Mike. For God's sake, if you are alive, answer me. Corio calling Patton. Corio calling Vrkka. Come in, Vrkka."

With sudden disgust he threw the helmet to the ground and buried his face in his hands. Nakeeta debated upon the best way to make her presence known to him. His words were understandable to her. Boldness might be her best chance. Coming upon him openly might allay his suspicions, but she must take care, for he had his strange weapon close to his hand. In his nervous condition, he would fire at any sudden noise.

She threw herself prone on the forest moss, behind the bole of a large tree. She would make a smaller target that way. It was true that she was frightened of him, more frightened of him than she had ever been of anything. Yet she had to speak to him, gain his confidence.

"Stranger!" Her clear voice echoed through the forest. "Stranger on Minanah, I come in peace. I would speak with you."

The man's hand leaped for his weapon, as she had known it would. He looked about him frantically for the source of the strange voice. It was the voice of a woman, unbelievably issuing from the green darkness that surrounded him. In a moment his mind cleared, and raced

with thought.

This was a native, a native who spoke his language. He might be surrounded, or the girl might be alone, impossible as it seemed in this tangled wilderness. He had to know. Carefully, he lowered his flame-gun.

"Are you alone?" His voice was steadier than he had thought it would be.

"Yes. Alone and unarmed."

"Then you may approach."

The vines parted, and she walked bravely into the clearing, into the face of his flame gun. She was a beauty. Her face was a pretty picture of confusion, but she did not seem to be afraid.

"I have been searching for you." Her voice was husky now, and sweet. "I longed to see what a man was like who had come from beyond the stars."

"What do you want?" His senses told him to be careful, that she might have friends in the forest. "I am glad to know that this is really Minanah."

"Yes, this is Minanah. When I heard that a great ship had come here, I had to know something of the great cities and strange worlds from whence my people came."

Corio relaxed, visibly. This was a woman like other women, and Corio flattered himself that he knew how to handle women. This one was a curious child, too naive to realize the danger in which she had placed herself.

"I looked for you at your ship," she continued. "There was no one there—only the signs of battle. I thought I would never find you."

Interest kindled in his eyes at her words. "The ship? Then you know where it is? You could guide me to it?"

"Maybe." Her smile was bargaining. "If you tell me first the things I wish to know."

"You say there was no one at the ship?"

"I could not enter. There was a dead body in the woods. A strange monstrous body, the like of which I have never seen."

"Was it a three-eyed humanoid?"

"Yes."

"That would be Vrkka. What else did you see?"

"Torn clothing, of a strange fabric I have never seen before—and the remains of a brave of our tribe. The animals fed well last night. There was not enough of the brave left to identify. Even the animals would not touch the body of the monster, however. Who was the brave? Tell me, did you see him die?"

"No." His thoughts were wandering. "That means Mike and Nana might still be alive. There must have been a fight with one of the natives, possibly the one who guided the strange green weapon from

which I fled."

"Someone, or something, had been dragged into the ship. The ground was too crowded with footprints to find evidence of their leaving it again. There was no sign of life aboard the craft."

"Then Mike has the woman, and he forced her back into the ship!" Anger thickened his voice. "The fool! Amusing himself with the woman, and I have been calling him all night! No wonder there has been no answer! Tell me," he asked in sudden suspicion, "How did Vrkka die?"

"A great hole seemed to have been blasted through his body."

"Then Mike did it after all. And the native?"

"There was nothing left of the native, but a smear of flesh and bone. I found his quiver, and half of it had been burned away." The tremor in her voice almost gave her away, but Corio took it to indicate her amazement and fear.

"Take me back to the ship. My friend is there, with the woman who also came with us."

"Wait." She smiled provocatively. "You promised to tell me of the great worlds beyond the clouds. So far I have told you everything, and you have told me nothing. Tell me of the lovely things the women wear, the wonderful sights and machines. They exist for me only in legend."

"Are you not happy here?"

Her eyes flashed. "Would you be happy, living like this?" Her eyes flashed scorn as she indicated the land she had always loved. "Did our ancestors ask us when they shut us away here from all people? I hate it here. I came to ask you to take me away with you when you go."

Her vehemence convinced him. He dismissed Nana's plight without another thought. It was too late to help her, if she had spent the long hours of the previous night with Patton. She could wait. Here was his chance of escape — this young girl, dissatisfied with her lot, might be his means of salvation. Even yet it might not be too late to take with him the wealth he had come to find.

He looked at her, deep into the honest eyes. "Do you know what you are doing?" he whispered, voice deep with a new note of passion. "You would give yourself to me, to go away with me?"

She nodded. He slipped one arm about her slender waist. He did not know the effort she expended to smile into his eyes, and listen to his words. Both were playing their game carefully. Narkeeta had no intention of leading the man back to the terrible weapons that must exist on that wrecked ship. She must ferret out the man's intentions, his method of escape. Her

body no longer mattered. It was a dead thing already, for her spirit was cursed. The man was speaking, and she listened through anxious ears.

"If you would like to go with me, you must help me to get away. We can find the metal, repair the ship. The entire universe is waiting for you. One as lovely as you are could have anything."

"Are there no other ships to help you? I do not like to wait." She forced hero worship into her eyes, the longing of the innocent for the unfamiliar.

His hated face came down, closer to hers, until his eyes were distorted, and his breath touched her cheek.

"I will tell you no more until you have proved to me that you are mine," he whispered hungrily. His mouth covered her own. His kisses burned her lips, the lips that had never known the touch of any save the Warriors. His alien body covered hers, forced her into the fragrant grasses, before she realized his intention. Then it was too late. Corio was a man, long abstinate, with the lovely and willing body of a young girl in his arms.

Shock blurred everything, made the girl oblivious to the disgust, the pain, the violation. It did not matter. Soon she would know the truth. She called upon her inner strength to keep up the pretense, to stay with the man until she could hear his words. Then she would kill him.

Later, he talked to her, and she knew his words held the ring of truth. He no longer had a reason to lie. "I cannot take you away without help," he said. "My ship is wrecked, and it will take months to repair it. I want to make friends with your people, and they will help me."

"My people would never help you. They fled from the outer worlds, and they will kill you or die themselves before our secret will be revealed. The Green God is displeased with you, and with me."

"What is the Green God?"

"What is it? That is hard to say. The Great Spirit is composed of the spirits and living souls of all good people of Minanah. It was a small thing, in the beginning. It has grown in power and strength and goodness through the generations of our people who have joined their souls in the Mist."

"In other words, a spiritual realm where all good people go when they die? Bosh. All worlds have some such story of a Beyond, an existence after death."

"Death?" She smiled. "On Minanah, death is only for the wicked. For those who live in peace and harmony with their neighbors there is only a transferring of planes of existence, a glorious transfiguration

of the spirit."

Corio laughed. "Same old story. I would like to see this Great Green God who keeps a planet under his dominion. But these things can never be seen, can they?"

"You met it once already, the first evening you were on our world," she told him quietly.

This time he roared with laughter. "Just my luck to sit the ship down on a volcanic plain, and in sight of your strange weapon. That story of yours is just a fairy tale. I would never believe in your God until I met it face to face."

"You may do just that," she told him ambiguously, "sooner than you think."

"You mean you think that green mist was the God, and not a weapon at all?"

"We have no need for weapons of war," she answered simply. "As long as the God of the Green Mist loves and serves its chosen people, there will be no strife on Minanah, nor any invader from the skies. No, you will get no help from my people. They fear and despise strangers."

"And you?"

Her eyes mirrored agony, an agony of mind too real to be faked. "I defied the God when I came here. I am no longer one of its children."

"But you are still a good citizen of good standing?"

"Oh yes. My secret lies between my God, and me."

"Then we will find a way. Guide me back to the ship, and then we may be able to plan our future moves."

Narkeeta still had no intention of leading him back to the ship, and her mind sought a way to send the news to the City, before he forced her hand. Only three of them remained. Corio the one called Mike, and a woman. Capture them, and the danger would be over. The Little Flower dared not let her thoughts travel further into her uncertain future. Nothing waited there but disgrace and death in the mountain pits. Despoiled, a liar, rebelling against the God, she expected no other fate. She had strayed far from the teachings of her people. Still she loved them, and she had loved Rani. Though he was gone, she might have saved many lives by her efforts, lives that otherwise could never have joined the Spirit.

The sun was late in the evening sky. She shivered, and spoke to the man.

"It is impossible for me to find my way in the darkness." There was no way for the stranger to know she lied again. "We will sleep and rest, and on the morrow I will guide you to the ship. A few more hours will not matter."

"What if your people attack the

ship, and harm it further? I think it better we go now, while we can."

"My people have no further use for the ship. The God destroyed it, and henceforth it will be avoided as a place of evil. We will be safe. Anyway, your friend is at the ship. He can protect it, for we have no way to pierce the metal sides."

She smiled in the tantalizing way that was still so new to her. She would make any sacrifice to keep him here, until she could warn the sentries. Her body no longer mattered. He could have it, if it would keep him quiescent until he fell asleep.

Corio thought of the dark jungle, of the ferocious animals that teemed within it. This maiden had no further reason to lie. She had given herself to him freely, and he knew he was the first. The foolish girl had thrown caution to the winds, and cast her lot with his. The warm fire and the fragrant grasses waited, and her lips were sweet. He could wait til morning.

Narkeeta waited until the man, satiated, lapsed into a deep, exhausted sleep. She inched away from his side slowly, so slowly that she hardly seemed to move. Once the fire blazed brightly, and a log broke, crackling and sending a shower of sparks upward. She froze into immobility, but the man did not stir.

Carefully, she worked her way across the clearing. When she turned for a last look, he was sleeping like one dead, his cruel mouth slack with dreams. She flitted away from the camp on silent feet. Several times she detoured, as her keen hearing and inbred sense of danger warned her of trouble ahead. It was not long until she reached a tunnelboat entrance, the same one Rani had used on his fateful trip.

She had prepared her message before she arrived, and she spoke it into the ship's recorder with a minimum of words. She told of Rani's murder, and the evidence of the abandoned quiver. She spoke of the repulsive body of the Martian, and ended:

"The party is separated. The man called Mike and a woman are still in the ship. The one called Corio is lost in the forest. I found him there, three ells off the west game trail, not far from the Night Pool. He trusts me. Beware of the weapon he carries. It blasts fire and death. He showed me its power, and taught me to use it. It is evil. These people comprised the entire party. They have no allies." Her face colored, and her chin rose bravely as she continued. "These things and more have I discovered from this Corio, who wishes to take me with him when and if he ever leaves Minanah. I go back to him now, and if he has not discovered

my absence, all will be well. Send a war party to my aid. Capture this Corio, and we can either force him to relinquish the secret of entering the ship, or we can surround them and starve them out. Be cautious, and remember my words of the flame gun. No more blood of Minanah must flow. I have completed my mission, and done my duty for the Warrior. All this, and more, have I done for him."

Her voice stopped. The spinning recorder ceased, and she flicked the switch that lighted the words 'Urgent Message' on the dashboard. She set the controls on automatic, and closed the door. The ground beneath her feet hummed and vibrated with power, and the tunnelboat was gone, a silver streak through the mountains, bearing her message.

She sighed, and her footsteps lagged. The night was beautiful. Roseate Garou chased golden Rou across the heavens. It was a night of peace and beauty, not violence. It was almost over. The dawn would come, but things would never be the same again. Sick hatred walked through the darkness by her side.

Ahead of her, she heard the snarling and spitting of an angry cat. She would have detoured, but the sound of human voices carried over the night sounds, and made her wonder. She did not know that when she decided to investigate she was walking into her destiny.

Rani wakened long before the woman, Nana. Strength was returning to his giant sinews, toughened by a lifetime of hardship. Even so, he staggered when he tried to rise and almost fell. His side was painful, but not unbearably so. Carefully, resting often, he explored the remainder of the ship. The space suits, with the spacephones built into the helmets, fascinated him the most of anything he found. With this article, he could find Corio if he were so minded. A night and day had elapsed since he had promised to return to the City. He wondered, sickly, what the Elders and the Little Flower thought of his absence.

Now was the time to think, while the alien woman slept. He tried to keep moving, though he rested often. He found food, and his agile mind quickly found the way to open it. He marveled at the magic way it heated in his hand.

When he had finished eating, he looked in upon the woman. She lay, cheek upon her hand, sleeping like a child. At first he could not understand the strange emotions this woman roused within him. His gentle heart had never experienced lust, or passionate desire. His love for Narkeeta was a gentle thing, protective in its essence, pure and calm like lake water on a still day.

Now this woman had brought bitter yearning to lie like a sickness upon his soul. Her fair beauty called to everything masculine within him, as Narkeeta had never done. She was evil, bred of evil, and yet he longed to possess her, and he could not control that yearning.

She had belonged to the men on the ship. He did not hold himself in check because of imagined purity or innocence upon her part. It was the memory of Narkeeta that wrenched his heart. His love for her had always been a part of him. She was the ultimate in womanhood, kindness, purity. Only there was none of this unsatisfied craving in his love for her! Surely these strangers brought evil to everything they touched. Corruption crept with them everywhere they walked, and contaminated everything about them with fingers of evil.

He had to find a way to rid himself of Nana, to find his way back to peace and normalcy. She had to be cut out of his mind and heart. He owed her no debt of gratitude, for he was convinced that she had saved his life for her own selfish purpose, and not for any reason of humanity. He could not go back to the City with Corio yet unfound. He cursed his stupidity in rushing so insanely to the girl's rescue. After the arms of the Martian, the fat man should have been a pleasure.

He was confused, his mind muddled. He had lived forever with a dread of outlanders, lived by a creed that said, "Live in the peace of mankind, under the Shadow of the Spirit, for we are the Spirit, and the Spirit is the people. Go not unto the lands beyond the stars, for there lie evil, corruption, pestilence, and falsehood. Only here can we live in the peace and simplicity of truth, under the protection of our God." He lived in disgust of all things evil, for these people had come nearer to a perfect life than any in the universe. Their God was unexplainable, but there were many things in the universe that were equally so. The crystal humanoids of Signar II, the energy eaters of Bail, the vegetable life forms of Centauri VI. Though Rani knew nothing of these things, his intelligence told him that the God was a strange force, the last of its kind, that was dwindling away on the lone planet when Jimmy Drinkwater first found it. Service and osmosis of spiritual force were needed to bring it back to its old glory, and the protection and preservation of the human spirits who came to give it life was a small price to pay. The God sensed things with a perception impossible to humans; knew and warned of all danger. Yet Rani had not known

it held the power of self-locomotion. There were stories that the God had flown through the skies in the beginning, to the home the first settlers had built for it in the City, but these Rani had put down to superstition. Now he had seen it with his own eyes.

His mind wandered, searching for the best way out of his dilemma. He dared not return to the City, even by tunnelboat, for he might be seen or followed, and the entrances to the web of paths that led to the City must be protected at all costs. Nana's words could not be trusted, for she was one of them. Corio might be a scout for many ships in the skies above. Accomplices might even now be hurtling toward Minanah to sack and plunder, and make their life the thing of misery that existed in the legends. Foreigners were demons, feared and despised by all men. He must find Corio and force the truth from his lips. Only then would his mission be completed.

There was still Nana. Her he could not harm, or deliberately bring to harm. His mind cringed at the thought of the things that might be necessary to force her, and Corio, to talk.

A plan began to form at last. He would make her go with him into the forest, being sure that one of the helmets went with them. Once she was turned about in the jungle, he could desert her, leave her alone in the darkness. Then, surely, she would call Corio. He knew he could track the man, but he wanted to hear Nana call upon him for help, so that he would hear and see her treachery. It would be a simple matter to capture Corio. Then he could take them both to the City for questioning.

If only he dared leave her long enough to send a message to the City! But to do so would invite disaster. She must not have the freedom to call Corio without his knowledge. He did not believe she had called him the previous night, or the man would have returned ere now. Even Rani knew the helmet spacephones would be too weak to call above the atmosphere, and the equipment upon the ship would require time and skilled effort to repair.

For the first time he thought of weapons. Only then did he miss his quiver. That showed the great effect of the strange woman upon his mind. Not since he had killed his first buck had that quiver been absent from his side. His bow lay idly beside his pallet. One arrow remained—of all his beautifully tempered shafts, one lone arrow. His mouth twisted. Why had she left him even one?

He called her name, angrily, imperatively. Crying out, she sat upright, clutching the blankets about

her and looking around in fright. Realization dawned, and she recognized his tall form towering above her. Alarmed, she sprang to her feet.

"You should not be walking!" she remonstrated sternly. "Go back to bed."

"I am not a puny weakling," he answered. "Arise, and eat, for we are going into the jungle in search of Corio."

"But you are still too weak to travel," she protested. "Corio may be wounded, or dead. It is late, and darkness will fall before we can go far."

"We can take one of your space-phones with us. If we cannot find his trail, you will call him to us. He will be seeking you, but I plan to find him first. Only two things remain between me and returning to the lodges of my people. Corio — and you!"

"You are impossible!" she snapped, in sudden anger. "Unreasonable, biased, bigoted! It seems that you, worshiping truth as you do, would recognize it when it is placed before you!"

"We will march," he said roughly, "as soon as Rou starts her flight across the heavens."

"If you persist in this mad plan, you will be the death of us both in that awful jungle. What do you intend to use for weapons if we are attacked?"

"You graciously saved my bow and one arrow. The Gray Warrior needs no more than one." His face colored as he realized his personal name had slipped out of his mouth, naturally and without forethought, to this girl his every instinct screamed was an enemy, with his heart protesting all the while.

Obediently, Nana went about her preparations. There was nothing else to do. Wherever he went, she would follow. She had no other means of protection or companionship. She would not admit, even to herself, that her feeling for the native went deeper than a gregarious instinct and a desire for protection. It might be best that they did find Corio, and get the truth from him. Maybe, then, Rani would believe her.

He sat stoically, unmoving as a rock, and watched her. The dark eyes fastened so closely upon her made her nervous. She knew he must be in pain, but when she came to him to offer medication, he drew away and shook his head in refusal.

"You will have no chance to drug me again, and warn Corio," he told her. "Not for nothing did I come through the Fiery Trials into manhood. It will take more than a wounded side to finish me."

For the first time, she burst into tears.

"I can stand no more of this," she sobbed. "I have suffered much

since we left Pluto. There have been endless days and nights of horror, until you miraculously came to my rescue. You are a stranger to me, Rani, but through your coldness, I can see that you are good and kind. Do not be cruel. Let us be friends, at least, and give me a small benefit of the doubt. I am alone on a strange world, and a victim of awful circumstances. I hate the men who brought me here. You are my only hope of survival. Please be my friend."

"All strangers are enemies of Minanah." He intoned the words he had learned by rote. "And a woman who would join such an expedition is a yet more bitter enemy. For while men may lie and steal and kill with their hands, a woman does it with her heart."

Nana straightened her slender shoulders in resignation. "This is a parody of frustration," she sighed. "I will help you find Ben Corio."

"Where can I find an opening to the outside world?" he asked. "It must be near to nightfall, and I would watch for Rou-rise."

"Follow me," she said as she led him to the control room, where the giant visi-plates were covered with sliding metal. It took their combined strength to shift the panel. Nana saw that the visi-plates were cracked in the corners, spider webbed with silver lines. She had never seen a damaged visi-plate before. They were made of the most nearly indestructible of any known material. The lines spoke mutely of the power of the green mist that had attacked them.

From the safety of the ship, she could see more clearly the beauty of this world. The forests were both forest and jungle, lush and ripe and impenetrable. The glow had died from the foothills, and they were blue again against the darkening sky. The plain stretched away from the great scar that held the ship, and everywhere there was peace and beauty.

Rani stood behind her, leaning against a bent metal beam. His face was no longer inscrutable, as he looked down upon her from his great height. There was gentleness in the lines of his mouth, pain and longing in his dark eyes. If he had stood so another moment, he would have drawn her into his arms.

He turned abruptly. "We have two hours until Rou-rise. We will eat."

She prepared food for both of them, and he ate, though he was not hungry. When they finished the food, she examined the dressing upon his side. It was holding firm, and he gained strength hourly. Perhaps soon he would be back with his people, and the girl he had called the Little Flower. How must it seem to be loved by such

a man? Lucky girl, this Narkeeta, not to find hatred and revulsion in those steady eyes. She diverted her thoughts, amazed at the nagging little sense of jealousy she felt.

They left the ship by Rou-rise. The moon shone rich-gold, and its light softened and blessed the darkened world. Rani never thought to examine the ground at his feet, or he might have seen the faint outlines of a slender mocassined foot by the Rou-light. Rani, the fabulous woodsman, had his eyes on the jungle and his mind on Nana.

He avoided the section of forest that held Vrkka's remains, and cut into the woods slightly to the west of the waterhole. He bore to the east, guiding Nana easily through the underbrush, until they found the well defined game-trail.

Nana seemed worn and weary. She moved stoically along the beaten path by his side, though he set the pace much too fast even for himself. He carried the helmet with its precious spacephone under one arm. His side ached and burned under the compress she had sprayed there. He was weak and sick from the awful fever that had ravaged his body during the preceeding night. He looked at the blonde head beside him, and cursed his traitorous heart. He wished he could take her throat between his strong hands and crush the evil from her heartlessly, as she deserved. He must spend long days of fasting and penance for his unworthy desires. He did not wonder so much whether Narkeeta could forgive him, as whether he could ever forgive himself.

Once they were well into the forest, he led her into the solid wall of jungle, away from the game trail. She followed him blindly. He took a circling path deliberately to deceive her. There was nothing but a blind tangle about them now, snarled and twisted, filled with dripping vines. They were both gasping with exhaustion from their fight with the jungle. Even Rani knew that he could go no further. He spied a fallen tree, and motioned wordlessly for rest. She sank down upon the truck, and leaned her white face upon her arms. Rani dropped the helmet beside her, and stood still for a moment, gathering his own waning strength. Then he reached for a low hanging branch and disappeared quickly into the foliage above them. He felt his wound tear, and the warm stickiness of fresh blood under the compress, but he lifted his great body so silently and swiftly that not even a leaf trembled to indicate the manner of his leaving.

The realization that she was alone must have crept upon Nana for she raised her head suddenly, in the manner of a startled fawn. Her glance darted about her

nervously, seeking the reassurance of his presence.

A low cry broke from her throat as she realized he had deserted her. "Rani!", she called despairingly. "Rani! Don't leave me!" She got to her feet, her cries changing into hysterical sobs. Forgotten was the helmet, forgotten everything but a sense of panic and claustrophobia because of the encroaching jungle. They reached out for her with branches no longer friendly since Rani was gone. She began to run, wildly, searching for any way out of menacing trees. The underbrush caught at her body, ripped and tore at her tender flesh, but she did not feel it. Flight seemed the only panacea for her terror. Anywhere would be better then this.

Rani watched her, puzzled, and with disgust. Surely she would come back and use the helmet, for upon that one thing his entire plan depended. He could hear thrashing about in the underbrush, like an idiot. Surely the stupid woman realized that the noise would attract the beasts! The night was a friendly thing to the Warrior, and he did not understand that the darkness and the fear had brought the girl to the point of crack-up.

There was a complete cessation of sound. Not the dwindling of noise into the distance, but sudden and absolute silence. Startled, he took an easy path among the branches that formed a bridge above the forest floor. A thin smile creased his lips before he reached his quarry, and he slackened his pace. Little, muffled sobs reached his ears, sobs that sounded as though she were very empty of tears. Yes, there she was, in an exhausted heap on the forest moss, head buried in her arms, shoulders shaking.

It was something else that made his body tense, and the smile vanish from his face. The unnatural sag of a tree branch above her drew his eyes, and he could see the burning orbs of the great tawny body that crounched there, muscles tensing to leap. Lips were drawn back over snarling fangs. Even as Rani fitted his long arrow to his bow, he wondered how the girl could lie there, unconscious of the juggernaut of destruction poised above her head. Surely these white people were the most helpless, stupid people in all of creation!

The bow twanged, the arrow sped like a buzzing hornet of death. The cat reared, screaming, spitting, clawing, at the barbed shaft that protruded from its chest. Nana cowered further into the moss at the sound of that insane scream, and crawled away from the body that came crashing through the limbs to land, twitching, at her side.

The lithe body of the Warrior landed lightly before her, and his

eyes met hers over the fallen body of the beast. His unreliable heart sang that she was safe. In a single moment he bounded across the animal and clutched her hungrily, thankfully, in his arms. They stood thus, for a long moment, hearts, thudding in unison.

Common sense prevailed, and he cast her from him with a visible shudder. She shrank from him, weakly.

"Better you had perished under the fangs of the cat!" he spat angrily.

"Please," she spoke humbly. "Say no more. Only do not leave me to the terrors of this awful night. I am afraid."

"Your beauty hides a black heart. We of Minanah never lie, and I cannot believe you can be truthful. You are evil, and I cannot bring myself to be one with your evil." He turned toward her, his face tortured. "As much as I want to believe you, I cannot."

Her shoulders slumped, and she brushed the mass of honey colored hair from her cheek with one weary hand. She seemed so small and helpless, so lone and alone, that he longed to comfort her. He steeled his heart, and remembered the conversation he had overheard that first night at the waterhole.

"Who was Vrkka?" he asked dully. "Was Vrkka your mate? 'Get rid of Vrkka,' the small one said, 'and we can share the woman.'" His hand lashed out and caught her arm in a grip of steel. "Who was Vrkka! Speaker of lies, tell me!"

He was hurting her, and she cried out in pain.

"Vrkka protected me against the others. His people believe in the protection of women. He is not even a man in your sense of the word. He cannot mate with an Earth-woman! If you will go with me to his body, I will prove it. Rani, do not be so cruel, when I love you so!"

The words were out at last. In the stress of emotion she did not at first realize what she had said. The expression on his face was one she would always remember. Gradually, his grip loosened upon her arm, and he spoke bitterly. "The Great Spirit have mercy upon me, for I love you also."

With a groan, he caught her in the arms that had longed to hold her, covered her lips with burning kisses.

This was the scene that Narkeeta came upon. Her eyes would not believe the evidence they saw. It was the Warrior, returned miraculously from the dead, and in his arms was the woman from beyond the stars. She felt that she was dreaming, her mind wandering under the burden of the things she had borne.

"Rani!" Her sweet voice rang through the night. "Rani, my Sire!"

He turned eyes, still misty with passion, to the sound of that clear voice. Her little figure, straight as a birch sapling came to him through the Roulight, and knelt in adoration at his feet. Soft lips touched his hand, a voice trembling with gladness murmured, "It is truly you! Thank the Great Spirit that you live."

"Narkeeta!" His eyes would not accept the evidence of his senses. "What are you doing here?" Gently, he lifted her to her feet.

"You did not return, Gray Warrior. I came to find you, and to complete your mission if you were disabled. I found your quiver, half blasted away, and your broken arrows. There was death there, too—but who's I did not know. I thought surely it was you who lay there."

"This woman saved me. I thought she had taken my weapons. Forgive her, Little Flower, for she did not know about the quiver."

"I have found the one called Corio," Narkeeta continued. "He sleeps, and I slipped away to send a message to the City for help. There are no other ships. This I know as truth. Only a man called Mike remains."

"It was his body that you took for mine. I must explain, Narkeeta, that the thing you saw when you found me—"

"I need no explanation, dearest. You are safe, and that is the thing that makes my heart sing in happiness and delight. I see that you live and breathe. It is a miracle. If this woman saved your life, she deserves your eternal gratitude, as well as my own."

Narkeeta turned to Nana, and her smile was such that Nana found herself spontaneously smiling in return. She could see that this woman was right for Rani. The two were perfectly mated and this little flower possessed a bravery and understanding that Nana knew she could never equal. These two belonged to each other, and the thing she and Rani had shared was a brief outburst of passion. This girl was beautiful, too, with a look of fragility that belied the tempered steel beneath. Nana knew she had fallen in love with the Warrior, but she was the interloper, and not Narkeeta. She could not be a deliberate rival of this lovely, honest girl.

"It was my fault, Narkeeta—this thing you saw." Nana felt that it was she who owed the explanation. "Your Warrior killed that giant cat who would have taken me as it prey. I was frightened, and grateful."

"Of course you were. I understand. We will forget it, for there is time later to think and to talk of

these things. Now that I know you are with Rani, and the man called Mike is dead, I am anxious to hurry back to the camp of Corio. Once the blight of his presence is removed, my world will be at peace again. The jungle will cover the ship, and all signs of the foreigners will be gone forever."

Narkeeta did not let the inward pain she felt find its way into her voice. For she had heard Rani, her own Gray Warrior, when he said, "The Great Spirit have mercy upon me, for I love you also." He had never spoken with that tone of broken passion to her. It was too late, anyway. She was not worthy of Rani after the things she had done. If only she had listened to the Spirit when she had the chance! Now it was too late—too late!

"That is a flame gun you carry at your side, is it not?" Narkeeta motioned with interest, toward the weapon that swung at Nana's side.

"Yes, it is." Nana was rueful. "It does us little good, however, for none of us knows how to use it."

"I do." Rani looked at Narkeeta in surprise. "The man called Corio taught me." Her laugh was hollow. "He taught me many other things also. Give me the gun, for I would have my own revenge on Corio."

Rani looked at the Little Flower oddly. There was something strange about her, something that had never been there before. He was thankful to Nana for taking the blame for their tempestuous embrace, but he felt guilty for allowing her to do so. His feelings mattered not, however. It was Narkeeta who must not be hurt by his own vacillating emotions.

Thus it was that Rani walked through the forests of Minanah that awful night, wracked with indecision. The dark girl and the fair one walked beside him, and his heart was sore. He loved them both, and such a thing could not be. He knew where his loyalty belonged—with the girl he had loved all his life. And he did love Narkeeta. He always would. Yet, the Green God forgive him, a part of his heart would always belong to Nana, also. He saw no way out of his misery.

Narkeeta paused, raised one slender hand for silence. "Corio's camp is ahead," she whispered. "It is not far from the Night Pool. Go no further, for I shall continue alone."

"No." The words burst from Rani's lips. "You have endangered yourself enough. I do not understand how you could have come here at all. The Elders, your father, aye, even the Spirit! How could they have allowed you to come here alone?"

Narkeeta's eyes were dark pools. Her words came from soft, full lips, pinkly shining in Garou's light,

the Garou who was rapidly chasing Rou from the heavens.

"I could not leave you in danger, Great Gray Warrior. My father I rule with a wand of love. Tumbo did not know of my coming. Father promised to hold off the war braves until tomorrow, with my safety as a club. I sent them a message, asking them to come. We no longer need delay."

"And the Spirit? What said the Spirit of your journey?"

Bravely she faced him, and spoke the truth. She had never lied to him, and she never would.

"I defied the Spirit. It refused my blessing."

"No!" The word was explosive. "You, of all people, defying the Spirit! Now I know you shall not go back to the stranger's camp alone. Narkeeta, how could you have done this thing?"

"I feared for you. And I must go back, now, alone. You know I speak only truth to you, and you must see that there are things that only I can settle with Corio."

He looked into her eyes and saw that she spoke truth. He bowed his head submissively, and she turned away, eyes downcast.

Nana was a spectator, an outsider who felt she did not belong here. She saw Narkeeta's small form disappear into the darkness before she felt Rani's eyes upon her, and heard him speak.

"Nana, you must understand!" His words pleaded. "She must not be hurt. Not the Little Flower!"

"I understand." She felt she could answer him freely, for she did understand. "We are many worlds apart. You belong with her. I will not interfere with either of you. I only want you to know, Rani—Great Gray Warrior—I meant it when I said I loved you."

"I—I believe you, Nana."

"Thank you." She turned from him, avoiding his eyes.

The blam of the flame gun rang through the night, slapped itelf into their consciousness. It had not died away before Rani leaped ahead, dashing toward the origin of the sound. Nana followed as best she could, until she saw the flash of the firelight between the trees, and they came out of the woods upon a scene that she would always remember.

Narkeeta had blasted Corio mercilessly, while he slept. Hatred burned in eyes unused to showing it, and her voice was wild as she laughed and spoke to the dying man whose eyes still held the film of interrupted sleep.

"Fool!" Narkeeta was exultant. "Know before you die how much I hate you! A maiden of Minanah would never leave it, and certainly not for such as you! I am promised to the Gray Warrior, and because of you my pledge is broken.

Hated foreigner! Death to you and all who ever follow in your footsteps, for you brought death to Minanah! You brought death to me! How does it feel, foreign devil, to feel death breathing on your heels? Gladly, gladly, I see you die!"

"Narkeeta, what are you saying?", Rani cried in agony. "What has happened to you that you can speak so? What strange cruelty is this?"

The dying man's hand had crept from beneath his prone body as she spoke. Too late, Rani saw the flash of steel in the firelight, and even as he leaped to intercept it, he knew he was too late. The gun spoke angrily, and Corio collapsed, his eyes glazing with the the blank stare of death.

A whimpering cry came from Narkeeta's throat, as she clutched at her chest with trembling hands. There was a thin trickle of fluid over her fingers as she seemed to crumble, in slow motion, to the ground.

"Narkeeta!" Rani gave a tortured cry as he raced to her side, and lifted her shoulders in his mighty arms. Nana stood, white faced, frozen, an unwilling witness to the tableau unfolding before her.

Blue-black hair tumbled over Rani's forearm and softly her head turned until her lips were pressed against his shoulder.

"I loved you well, Gray Warrior," she whispered, through the pain. "Yet it is best this way, for both of us."

"Believe me, Little Flower, I love you also. You have been my life's companion and my promised wife. Do not tire yourself with talking. I must take you to the Great Spirit. He will make you well."

Her eyes clouded with tears. "No. I must speak while there is yet time. My wound is mortal, not only in my body, but in my soul. I thought you dead. To learn the truth for my people I have broken the most solemn laws of the Spirit. I am fit only for death."

Rani gave a great groan. "Do not speak so, Little Flower. The Great Spirit will accept you. It must be so."

The dying girl turned her eyes to Nana, still standing by the embers of the campfire.

"There is a great flame between you and the woman of the golden hair." ned flecked bubbles stained the corners of her tense mouth as she still fought to speak. Rani wiped them away, and she continued, more faintly. "Go to her, with my blessing. Remember me not as the shameful woman who seduced Corio for his secrets, but as I was before—" she slumped suddenly in his arms, her breath gurgling in her

throat.

Rani rose to his feet, the slender body of the girl clasped closely in his arms. He looked at Nana, his face tortured.

"We must take her to the home of the Great Spirit," he said huskily. "She still lives, but this is the sleep that heralds death. She must not die, alone and cursed to oblivion!"

A strange noise brought Nana out of her state of paralysis. "Listen," she whispered.

There was a deep rumbling, a stirring from the bowels of the planet. It rose steadily into a thunder, a cacaphony of sound. Then it diminished, and they could hear the rising of the musical wind that accompanied the Green God on its passage through the skies over its beloved planet. Closer it came, closer, over the forest from the mountains.

"It is the Great Spirit!", Rani murmured in awe. "The Green God is leaving its home again!"

The green glow came, faintly at first. It rose, fell, sparkled about them. Rani laid the little figure of Narkeeta at his feet, and backed away solemnly. Then he fell to his knees, his whole body a statue of supplication. After a frightened moment, Nana followed suit, her face turned upward toward the light of the magnificent and terrible Spirit.

Humbly, Rani began to chant, in his deep voice, the Prayer for the Dying.

"Spirit, Father of Minanah
For thy mercy we beseech thee.
Seek the good and not the evil
Of this one who lies before thee.
Take unto thy mighty bosom
This, thy daughter of Minanah.
Take her, heal her wounded spirit
Hold her in thy peace, forever."

The God of the Green Mist was directly above them now, shedding his unbearably beautiful light upon them. Narkeeta's eyelids flickered in that unnatural glow, and opened. She was refreshed and made strong again by the nearness of the magnificent energy above her. With inhuman strength, she lifted her wounded body, and held out empty arms to the Deity above her.

"Forgive," she murmured hungrily. "Forgive!"

Spiraling nebulae of mist floated downward, reaching for her outstretched hands. The music in the skies grew louder, indescribable in its joyous beauty. The mist-arms touched Narkeeta, and she rose to her feet, bathed in the green diamonds that were a part of the Great Green God. She stood, healed and strong and filled with the great vitality that had always been a part of her wonderful youth. And the peace, the naked yearning that transformed her face were almost part of her wonderful youth. And

bear. The two kneeling forms turned their eyes downward, humble in the presence of so much happiness and joy.

When they looked again, the body and the essence of Narkeeta were merging with the incredible energy that swarmed about her. She was welcomed tenderly into the healing strength of all her beloved friends before her, the energy of her life force blending with that of the Spirit, and leaving both stronger for it.

The body of Narkeeta was gone. Yet she lived, and would always live, in the protector and the guardian of her people. The Transformation was completed. Still the God of the Green Mist swirled above them, and the tinkling music was not stilled.

It moved downward, toward them, and Nana found that she was no longer afraid of it. Gently, as in a benediction, it flowed over and about them both. Nana felt peace, rapture, a sense of perfection that she had never known before. She was reluctant to escape when the sparkling beauty moved away from her. She found herself reaching, yearning, for the withdrawing force.

The God lifted, moved away across the tree tops, the music diminishing as it returned to its mountain home. Nana turned dazzled eyes toward Rani.

Gently, he lifted her to her feet.

"The God came for Narkeeta!", he murmured thankfully. "I knew it would not let her die. I have been wrong, Nana. There is no evil within you. The Great God blessed our love. It made us one, forever."

"I will never forget the miracle of seeing Narkeeta as she went to the God. It is so strange—there is no grief, no mourning, no sorrow. It is so beautiful!"

"And never forget she was a part of the Spirit that blessed our love. Come, dearest, for I will take you home to meet your new people. The long night is almost over. It will soon be morning."

THE END

Were You A Subscriber To "Science Stories"?

Guess you must be thinking by now that you "got stuck!" Well, it is true that we put out only four issues of SCIENCE STORIES, but at last we're back again, to fill out your subscriptions. The title of this magazine is really OTHER WORLDS Science Stories, but we know you won't object to the added words in the title. Especially after you read some of the stories. And the fact you got this in the mail means you're not stuck at all, but you'll get your money's worth in full! Just drop us a line, and tell us how you like the new look!

It was just another space-opera, Bill thought, so he and Jane were almost the last ones in their crowd to see it. Robby was right, it really was *snakerdworp*.

SNAKERDWORP

James Causey

"NOW look," Bill Petersen said wearily. "Tonight is your mother's bridge club. Tomorrow night I work on plant inventory. In any event I hate Space Operas—"

"It's not a Space Opera!" Robby's blue eyes were brimming. "You've got to see it! Please, father—"

"Don't nag him," Jane said, coming in from the kitchen. "Why don't *you* go see it again, son?"

Robby looked at them both, queerly. "It's not the kind of picture you see twice. It's *snakerdworp*."

"Eh?"

Robby flushed. "That's Antarean for 'out of this world."

Bill sighed and put down the evening paper. "That," he said indicating the blonde mahogany cabinet by the fireplace, "is a twenty-four inch special, full door, five hundred buck job which your mother wanted quite badly. We made a pact, chum. No more movies for three months. Pacts are sacred things."

Robby's thin face tightened as he eyed the television set. Abruptly he smiled. The sound crept into the room softly, achingly, a trilling agonized glissendo that set Bill's teeth on edge like fingernails across a blackboard.

"It's Peter," Robby announced, heading for the front door.

"That Adams kid?" Bill frowned. "Thought you hated his guts."

Something stirred behind Robby's eyes. "Things change," he said warily, and went out into the

blue twilight. The trilling rose and died.

Bill looked at his wife. "That," he said, "is Antarean for I sired an idiot."

Jane came over and ran a hand through his hair. "Children are vicarious little beasts. He only wants to see things through your eyes, darling."

Bill grunted. "Something's gotten into him last week. No more baseball practice after school, just filling my garage full of junk, the intestines of old radios, pieces of wire. All of a sudden its father instead of pop." From the garage came sounds of hammering. "What are they making out there, a rocket ship?"

"It's just a phase," Jane said, troubled. "Why don't we go see it, Bill? It's important to him."

Bill looked thoughtful.

Jane held her breath.

"Come on," Bill said finally. "I'll take you to bridge club."

Normally Jane's bridge night was a relaxed chatty affair, with gossip delicately exchanged over coffee and three-no-trump hands which were seldom made. Tonight was different. Margaret and Dolly and Rose seemed horrified when the topic of *Slave Raid* came up and Jane confessed she had not seen it.

"It's just another three-D, isn't it?" she asked, and Dolly glared. Openly *glared*.

"Dear," Rose said frostily, "it's not her fault. I'm sure she'll see it this weekend."

"Bill's working on inventory," Jane said lamely.

A frigid silence.

"You poor darling," Margaret said.

"But it's only a picture," Jane tried to laugh it off.

"Only a picture," Dolly said disdainfully.

They played in bleak silent the rest of the evening. Even when Jane made a superb vienna coup at seven diamonds Rose merely yawned. Jane moistened her lips, staring around the table at these three women she had known for so many years. Three impassive strangers.

"We'll probably see it next week," Jane said with an eager desperation.

"I'm sure you will," Margaret said.

Or else we'll drop you from the club, *dear*.

Next afternoon Jane was making Fruit Saboyan in the kitchen when Robby came home from school.

"Good afternoon, mother."

Jane spilled the cointreau. "What on earth!"

Robby had a coil of ancient

telephone cable draped over one scant shoulder. His shirt was filthy with grease. "Found it at the junkyard," he said proudly. "Make a wonderful resistor coil." He went out into the garage, whistling.

Perhaps five minutes later Jane heard a birdlike twitter from the alley, and an answering trill from the garage. She went quietly out to the service porch. She listened.

"They go yet?" Peter inquired.

"No." Disgustedly: "Space Opera he calls it. What a slob!"

A furious hammering.

"You get your quota for the week yet?"

Bitterly: "No. Shamed Billy Gordon at school, though. He's going tonight."

"Good, good."

"*Shh*, I'm making contact."

A hush.

Then a faint metallic twittering.

Jane squinted through the screen.

Through the open garage door she could see them crouched over the maze of old radio tubes, the fantastic coil of wiring. They were listening, intent as two predatory little birds.

"It's no use," Robby said. "We need more thorium."

"I'll make some tonight."

"Space Opera," Robby said. "*Snellor.*"

Peter looked up, stiffening. "Hello, Mrs. Petersen," he said.

In the hot afternoon silence they stared at her, their thin faces utterly devoid of emotion. Jane felt a tiny shiver crawl up her spine.

"Looks like a broadcasting set," she offered.

"Very good," Robby said curtly. Peter was smiling secretly.

"Why don't you see *Slave Raid*, Mrs. Petersen? You'll enjoy it."

"She made a *pact.*" Robby said it like a curse word.

"We'll see," Jane said helplessly.

Bill came home early. He came into the kitchen with a dazed expression and said, "Baby, how'd you like to go to moom pitchers tonight?"

Jane's blue eyes got impossibly round. "What about inventory?"

"Inventory be damned," Bill said. His eyes were glazed. "It's persecution, by God. Half the office gang gave me the deep freeze when they found out I hadn't seen it. Old J. B. called me in, said never mind tonight, take off and relax. See *Slave Raid.*" He exhaled slowly, remembering the way J. B. had wiped his glasses, had wheezed, "You look a little peaked, Bill. Too much nose to the grindstone, what?" Then: "Haven't seen that new three-D thing, have you boy? Too bad. Why not take the even-

ing off? Inventory? Tut, we'll hold down the fort. Don't worry about a blessed thing. Start with a new perspective in the morning, what?" He winked openly at Harker, the office manager. "Sam and I, *we've* seen it."

"Yes sir, J. B.," Sam said.

Bill mopped his forehead, stared at Jane. "Everybody," he said. "Everybody's gone nuts. Except us."

Jane told him about the bridge club and Bill said quietly, "I don't like it. First Robby, then your friends, then my boss." He hesitated. "Get dressed, honey."

Faint and clear in the outside dusk came a trilling echo, like a faraway sob. Jane was suddenly afraid.

"Why don't we just—not go, Bill?"

"You get dressed," Bill said.

The Palace Theatre was downtown, and mobbed. The marque blared: "NEW! DAZZLING! PUTS *YOU* IN THE PICTURE."

"Supposing we don't want to be in the picture," Jane mused, standing in line.

Bill stared at the people emerging from the lobby. Their faces were pale, rapt. They gazed in a quiet wonder at the snake's dance of neon signs down Main Street, at the bright rush of downtown traffic. A few of them trilled, experimentally. Jane plucked at Bill's sleeve.

"I've got a sick headache," she murmured. "Let's go home."

Bill had bought the tickets. He hadn't heard her. He was blinking at the plaster replica of a life-sized Antarean in the lobby entrance. The thing had one purple eye in the center of its green forehead. And tentacles. And the inevitable ray gun.

"Look, baby," Bill said grandly, "its old hat, just like War of the Worlds, see? These things come from outer space and mop up the earth. Then just when everything's gone smash, this scientist invents a secret weapon. Presto, the invaders get slaughtered! Just like Space Patrol. You'll see."

Jane saw.

It was better than three-D.

It was better than Panorama.

It was color and flame and horror, and the great needle ships plunging out of the blackness of space and levelling the world to ashes. New York was a crimson hell, Chicago a smouldering crater. The ocean boiled. Everywhere, man died. The ships finally landed. The Antareans came out.

The audience whispered. Jane tried to close her eyes.

"Now the secret weapon," Bill whispered.

They saw a group of scientists working feverishly in an under-

ground cavern. They were building a weapon. The ultimate weapon. It was a race against time.

And man lost the race.

For the Antareans located the secret cavern and killed the scientists, horribly.

In the darkness, people muttered and swore. Jane squeezed Bill's hand, breathed, "I'm afraid. Let's go, now. Please."

"I want to see the end." Bill's voice was stone. "How can the censors pass anything like this. Look!"

The final scene. A huge ship was taking on cargo. Slave cargo. Humans, herded sheeplike up the ramp into the ship's maw, being taken to fire mines of Antares. Antarean overseers applied the lash and the captives screamed.

Now a final close-up. The screen expanded. They saw the faces of the captives, gray with despair. Two of those faces were familiar.

Jane recognized the faces. She could not scream. There was a wrench and a falling and a sickness, a blinding light and agony.

She was outside, in the molten sunlight. She was moving with other people up some sort of ramp. Bill was beside her, swearing in a cracked dull monotone.

The Antarean guard laid a whip across their shoulders and she cried out. In the sky was a square-shaped black void. It grew and grew, eclipsing the sun. Jane whimpered. It was like looking into the wrong end of a telescope.

There they were, sitting three rows down, the two things that were her body and Bill's body, clapping, now grinning at the screen, now getting up and leaving the theatre to go out and tell the others about the wonderful picture that was not just a Space Opera and now the thunder of trumpets and the final mockery of the words across the sky as the screen faded forever:

DNE EHT

6th ANNUAL MIDWESTCON

June 11th & 12th, 1955

Hotel Ingalls - Bellfontaine, Ohio

Many and vitriolic have been the editorial denouncements of the "transplanted western" science-fiction story; in a like manner, both editors and readers are apt to cast a bored and disdainful eye on the "after the atomic war" story. This, apparently, was all that was needed to send Robert Bloch rushing to his typewriter to turn out a post-atomic-war story with a wild-and-woolly-western setting — a story guaranteed to make the above-mentioned editors and readers retract their harsh words — in reference to this story, at least.

MAY have been two seasons ago, may have been three. This child don't shine at figures much. Doc, now—he's got a passel of books up to his lodge, and even Iron Head keeps a few in his *tipi*. But I never did hold with booktalk, not even for a white, let alone Injuns.

This jigger's happy and sassy as long as he's got his hide in one piece, with plenty of fleece fat to fill it, and a good gun and a few traps to set for the getting of plews. A rifle's all the company you need beyond the Platte. Come winter, of course, I push back to the river with my catch, and then I allow it's slick to hole up in a lodge of my own with a squaw for the fixing and the making of robes. But there's always a might to do, and no need for books even then—spite of all Doc's talk.

Book's won't skin a painter for you, or cure you of the flux. And books weren't handy agin *them* either. It was books caused all the misery in the first place, I figger. *They* have books aplenty.

But it was *them* I aimed to tell about, to begin with. Like I say,

Where The Buffalo Roam

By Robert Bloch

might have been two, could be three seasons back. It was fixing summer anyways, that I know. That's when *they* come.

I recollect the night it happened. Doc and Iron Head and I had headed back to the river to see if the team had come with the new guns and the ammunition. It was in, all right, and I got me a brand new rifle—along with a lot of blankets and such, and even some fancy folderol for Taffy. Taffy was my squaw; still would be, but she died birthing. Taffy had yellow hair, same as me. I guess she was more white than Injun, but they're all squaws.

Anyways, we'd had a regular pow-wow for a couple days after the team pulled in, like always, and Jed and Huck did a heap of bragging about the trip. They always fetch some tall stories about the places back Across the River. Doc holds the yarns are true, but I figger they stretch a mite.

Then we set out again, four party of us. Two headed upriver for the traps, one hit downriver with the team—to trade extry guns and shot with the next camp. Me and

Doc and Iron Head struck out west to buffalo country. The grass was in now, and we figgered they'd be ranging this way. We aimed to strike a big herd and drive it back to the river. Then the hull camp'd come out—boys and squaws and old folk alike—and just blaze away until we snagged a smart passel, enough for meat and skinning and curing to hold us through winter.

That was the scheme of it, and we reckoned on working our way for maybe two, three days.

But we struck it pretty the afternoon of the first day out. Coming up over a rise, just up from the plains, with the sun scorching our eyeballs fit to fry, and we looked down onto the level with the tall grass stretching for a hundred miles off.

But we didn't see any grass. Everything was black. Black and moving.

"Huh!" Iron Head let out a grunt. "Buffler!"

"Buffalo?" said Doc, squinting through those spectacles he wears. "Sure enough. But look at the size of that herd! You ever see so many, Jake?"

I had to allow as I hadn't. In all my born days, and I knowed this country ever since I was big enough to tote a rifle, I never did see a sight to match this one.

There was buffalo as far as sight would stretch, like a big black cloud settled over the land. Cows and calves and yearlings, young bulls with their horns still black and old bulls just lording it over the harems.

"Reckon we better circle behind?" I asked.

But Iron Head grinned. "Walk along," he said. "Take us two days to go around."

"What if they get riled up?" Doc said.

"Make noise," Iron Head told him.

I allowed as he was right—buffalo always scatter if you fetch them a start. That's how we aimed to stampede them to the river, by shooting guns. But right now we wanted to get on the other side of the herd, so as to drive them in the right direction.

So we walked down, moving close together, and headed straight for the herd. And Doc told us to sing.

That's what we did. We traipsed along, singing fit to bust the old songs, anything that come into our head. Tunes like TEA FOR TWO and ROLL OUT THE BARREL and THE SWEETHEART OF SIGMA CHI; all them songs with the crazy words. Made a powerful ruckus, too.

And you know, it worked. It got us into the herd all right, but come a time when this child won-

dered if we'd ever get out again. Wondered if there *was* an end to it, or if we'd just go wandering and singing along until our voice-boxes plumb wore out.

Because it was a herd the likes of which a hump-hungry feller dreams about. Doc's the head for figures, so I asked him. "How many you reckon? A million head?"

"Easy," Doc said. "We been walking close to three hours now. Seems to be no end to it."

"Strikes me mighty odd," I told him. "I don't allow as I ever saw more'n two-three thousand at a crack before."

"The herds grow every year," Doc come back. "It's like the old days. Remind me tonight and I'll tell you about it. But something must have happened to force them together this way."

"Dry," said Iron Head. "Powerful dry ahead. Dust storm, so they move. Buffler heap migratory ruminant."

He was right. Way off to the west the sun was going down and from the clouds I reckoned haze. The plains were dry, so the herds come together and move east to graze. Now, hoofing it through the center, this child could see that it wasn't one big herd at all —instead it was thousands of little herds, each one ranging from twenty to two-three hundred head. Old bulls heading their cows and the calves. Young bulls bunched together, hanging on at the fringes and waiting for a chance. And here and there, the strays and the cripples.

We didn't dast break off singing to talk much—I tell you it gave me a mighty crawly feeling to scrunch along through that grass, with hundreds of thousands of sharp-horned critters less than a holler away from us. They was making their own racket, too—calves a-bawling and them bulls roaring and tossing horn at any cow out of line. We spotted a few fights, too, and every once in a while a bull'd rear up for a mount. They smelled powerful strong that day, but the flies wasn't so bad around, account of the wind. That was a fancy fix, because at times you can't nigh breath for the clouds of flies pestering a herd.

We kept moving and singing and staring.

"Look at those spike-bulls," Doc said. "They get bigger every year."

It was true. Some of the young ones were crowding six feet, maybe ten, long. And I spotted some whopping big full-grown critters with a spread of maybe three feet; them horns run a good two feet long, and I allow as a couple topped a ton weight. That's more'n two thousand pounds.

Close up this way I made notice of the robes—regular brown a-plenty, with here and there a black, a beaver, a buckskin and even a blue. Iron Head squinted too; I knew what he was fixing for. He wanted a whitey if he could find one. Them whiteys are the rarest; you can fetch most anything you want with a white, from stale fire-water to a fresh squaw.

But he wouldn't snag one even if he saw it, because a shot might set the whole passel off. It was best we just keep on a-singing and a-walking, and so we did until it was raising a powerful dark.

Finally we got through, and oozed out the other side, onto a little dried-over crick bed. We didn't figger the herd'd move in the night, and come morning we could start the drive back. So we bedded down.

But first we made us a fire and broke out the supplies.

Iron Head stuck a pipe in his craw and curled up in his bag closing his eyes and looking like a hoss gone under for sure—it was always his way, come night at a camp.

Me and Doc just set there for a spell.

"I can't shake it," I said "All them critters, more than this child could count."

"Nature is fecund," Doc said.

"Wouldn't know about that," I told him. "But there's a powerful lot of breeding. Beaver, deer, elk, fish. And the flies and skeeters, and chiggers, too. Even up there." I pointed at the sky. "Look at that big white herd, forever roaming and twinkling down. Doc, do you reckon stars mate, too?"

"I wouldn't know," Doc mumbled. "And I don't want to find out."

"One thing's mighty dark to this child," I said. "And I been meaning to ask. Seeing that we're animals too, in a way—how is it that we never breed strong?"

"There's fifty-five of us on the Platte," Doc said. "And forty down-river, and another forty beyond. It's that way all over, Jake. Thousands of us, really."

But that's just a smidgin compared to the others," I said. "You'd figger maybe there'd be millions."

Doc sort of sighed. "There were, once."

"You mean like in the book-stories? About the cities and all?" I let out a bark. "Don't tell me you put stock in that talk, too.

"It's true, Jake. Where do you think the books came from? And don't Jed and the others take the team back to the ruins to get us guns and ammunition from the arsenals? You heard him tell about it with his own lips."

"I just can't swaller," I said. "I

always figgered he aimed to stuff us with his talk. Thousands of stone *tipis* in one place, wagons that used to run without a team—it don't hold with Nature."

"That's why everything turned out this way," Doc told me. "Men didn't hold with Nature. Jake, I've read it in the books. And my father told me what *his* father told him —*he* was alive and saw it when he was a boy. Once there were cities and towns and villages everywhere."

"What happened?" I asked. "What became of the people, and why?"

Iron Head opened his eyes for a spell. "People go under," he grunted. "Heap bad medicine called nuclear fission."

"That's right," Doc said. "They got to fighting, and they had weapons. Atomic bombs, nerve-gas. The cities were razed, the survivors scattered. And most of them didn't last long. They couldn't live in the open, they couldn't cope with the wilderness. They died of disease and plague, they froze in the winter, and they starved—"

"I don't rightly make out the meaning of the words," I told him. "But I'll allow you're talking straight about the fighting and maybe rough ways of killing. Only that part about the starving, now —how could they starve, with all this game here for the taking?"

Doc smiled. "You'd find it all in the books if you'd only be willing to learn," he said. "Iron Head knows the story, don't you?"

The Injun opened his eyes again.

"No story," he said. "Only biological inevitability to restore the balance of nature."

Sometimes that Injun-talk, or book-talk, whichever it is, gets me down. But Doc set up a hoot and a holler.

"Probably right at that," he said. "Here's the way it was, Jake. Originally, all this land was much the way you see it now. Then men came and settled. They killed the beaver, they fished the streams, they hunted buffalo and game until many animals were almost extinct. That means there were hardly any left.

"When the last wars were fought, there were only a few deer, a few buffalo, a few bear left roaming out here in the wilderness. There wasn't a wild creature east of the Big River at all. And the gas and the bombs and the plague killed off most of the domestic animals in the east—cows and sheep and pigs and horses. We've got a few horses here, but we're lucky; and you know we're trying to breed more, because we need them. Some day we might try plowing."

"Plowing for squaw men," Iron

Head muttered. "Agricultural perversion."

"Don't worry," Doc said. "It wouldn't be for a long time yet—and then, only if we have to." He turned to me again. "But I was telling you about what happened. There was no game, and people died. Only a few of us managed to survive, out here in the open. A few hunters, trappers, Indians."

Doc always talked like that—he never did learn how to say "Injun" rightly, but stuck to book-talk. Only I knew what he palavered anyhow.

"Gradually they came together, in little groups, for protection. The old crafts came into their own, the old speech-ways and folks-ways that had somehow survived through two centuries of so-called civilization."

"You mean city life?" I asked.

"City death," Iron Head said. And Doc nodded again.

"We managed. We survived. And the remaining animals bred again, unrestricted and unmolested. They multiplied quickly, so that for the past generation it's been like old times once more. Plenty of game, and the timber's come back up north, too. There's nothing left of the cities but ruins, and not even ruins where most of the villages and homesteads were. Life is simple again. Crude, perhaps, but—peaceful."

Sometimes I get the savvy of what Doc says, even if I can't understand the foferaw lingo. I knew what he meant now when I lay back and looked up at all the stars, blazing away.

Doc lay back, too. It was quiet and easy, 'cept for a kayote howling off on the ridge.

"You never did say about the stars, Doc," I told him. "Reckon they mate? Reckon anybody's ever hit out to take a look?"

Doc frowned. "What made you say that?"

"Nothing. Only I was figgering maybe if they had some of them contraptions you showed me once in the books—what they call them, rackets?"

"Rockets," Doc said. "No, men didn't reach the stars. But there at the last, they were to try for the moon. Some said that when war began, they actually took off and—"

He closed lip, fast. Then he sat up.

I sat up too. Iron Head was already standing, with his rifle cocked at the ready.

So it was no mistake. We'd all seen it and heard it at the same time.

It was like a big orange flash in the sky, over to the east. And like a big thunder. Only it wasn't light-

ning and it wasn't a storm. Something had hit, back there, near the river.

"Meteor!" Doc muttered.

"What's that?" I asked.

"I can't tell you now. Come on."

"Where you aiming to sashay to?"

"I want to see if I can find it." He was folding his pack. Iron Head stamped out the fire.

"All right," I said. "Reckon this child's not bent on rumping it far behind. But that thunder's getting nigher."

"Wait." Doc held up his hand. "He's correct!"

"Correct, hell," I said. "I'm right! Just you clean the grubs out of your ears."

We could all hear it then, roaring closer and closer. And now Iron Head was squinting off a ways, and he turned back and yelled, "Buffler! The noise—they're stampeding this way!"

No mistake the herd was pounding prairie. I could see them plain now, black moving on black, in a crazy wave.

Nobody had to tell this hoss what to do, or the others, either. We spread out and dropped to our knees. Then we started pumping lead.

"Fire together!" Doc hollered. "Else they can't hear you!" So we fired together, or tried to. And the wave come on, faster and faster, and I could see horns tossing in the starlight, and I could hear the bawling and panting and the drumming, and it did something to me inside so that I sort of tightended up all over because I knowed for a fact now that we were going under. Unless they heard, and stopped.

They did, and not a mite too soon, either. The lead bulls reared up, and then they crashed back against the cows, and for a minute they was milling around, raising dust. Then it was like a wave dying off into ripples that stretched way back, far as eye could see. And then they quieted down again, ready to graze.

Doc stood up, rubbing his knees. "That was close," he said. "Think we're safe to walk through?"

Iron Head nodded. "Come," he said. "We sing ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS."

So we walked back through the herd, and we sang ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS and ROLL ME OVER IN THE CLOVER and NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS and everything Doc could remember teaching us from the books at the rendezvous-sings at springtime.

It was even worse, in the dark, with the eyes and horns sort of glittering and skittering all around

us, but we went on. And on. And on.

Until we got back to the top of the ridge, where we'd come over in the afternoon, and looked down and saw it.

"God!" said Doc.

"The devil!" said Iron Head.

"What is it?" I asked.

But neither answered me, they just stared. I stared, too. This child has seen a heap of sights, but never nothing like this. Never nothing like this big shiny shape setting there on the prairie, bigger'n all the lodges and *tipis* put together.

We stared, and that's how it happened—how he fixed it so's he snuck up behind us. And we not noticing until the light come.

It like to of blinded me, at first, and I could scarce make out to aim. Then the voice come, and I knowed it was a man.

"Don't shoot," he said. "We're friends."

Iron Head was drawing a bead too; he's got Injun-eyes.

"Put it down," said the man. "We're friends, don't you understand?" He sort of jerked his head away, and it come over me he was talking to other men behind him. "Maybe they don't understand English."

All at once I could see. The light was coming from a little stick he held in his hand. It wasn't a torch, and it wasn't any kind of oil lamp I ever heard tell of. But the light was bright as day, and he stood there with three others behind him, all alike as chips under a buffalo. Wearing floppy duds all of one piece, but with bare heads; the hair cut short the way tads wear it, and not a beard to be seen. That's the truth of it -four overgrown nippers is what they shined up to be.

This child's not one to run from tads, and neither is Iron Head. We dropped our guns.

"That's better," said the one with the light. "Maybe they do understand, after all."

"Of course we understand," Doc told him. "It's just that you startled us."

"*We* startled *you?*" The man grinned. "That's a good one. But look, this is no way to meet. After all, it's a historic occasion. The very least it rates is a 'Doctor Livingstone, I presume', or something similar."

"Then you say it," Doc told him. "My name happens to *be* Doctor Livingstone."

It was book-talk, but I got the hang of it; enough to remember every word, even what I couldn't rightly reckon out. Because it was strange, I set store by it.

Doc pointed to us. "This is Iron

Head," he said. "And that's Jake."

"I'm Captain Buckton," the big tad told us. "And this is Lieutenant Thorne, Ensign Winters, Ensign Taylor." He nodded our way. "These Indians understand English?"

"Dry your gap," I spoke up. "I ain't no Injun. Iron Head here's a true Cree, but I allow as he can palaver better'n you hosses."

"No offense," Captain Buckton said. He took Doc by the arm. "It's wonderful to find you here. We didn't know what to expect—whether there'd be any life at all, for that matter. I presume you realize we've just landed. You can see the rocket down there."

Doc nodded. "We noticed it. But I could scarcely believe my eyes—there are still rumors preserved, of course, yet I never knew if anyone had succeeded in taking off."

"Tell you anything you want to know," Buckton said. "But come on, let's go down to the ship and make ourselves comfortable."

I looked at Doc and he nodded, so we trailed along. We let him and this Captain Buckton do all the jawing.

Now here's the meat, without hide or fat or guts or lights—according to the way Buckton skinned it. What Doc used to tell about was gospel-true, about the war and all. Seems there had been men that were set on hitting the sky trail, and they'd built these rockets out in the desert. When things got bad, they decided it was time to get shut of earth, and the whole kit and kaboodle took off for the moon.

Some made her, some went under. According to this Buckton—and Doc, he didn't make him out a liar—things on the moon ain't natural-like. He allowed as how your weight changes, and it's hard to breath, and there's no critters up there. But the ships that landed brought means of making air which I don't rightly comprend, and they dug lodges underground. From the talk, I figger they made regular cities like the old ones down here, only all underneath, living like prairie-dogs. For a while it was all leather and no fleece for them, until they got the hang of how to live that way. Then they got so's they could mine metals and make things and set up a way of making their air, and raised a bellyfull by some means—the word for it is "hydroponics", whatever that is. They knew how to get water too; Doc asked a powerful lot of questions, but it's of no nevermind to me. Main thing is, they done it.

All this time they figgered earth for a goner. But they were breeding up again, and wanted to fan

out, and for some seasons there was a heap of talk about coming back.

It weren't easy to ready a rocket for the trip, from all Buckton said, and they only hoped to make do with it once they got her.

Doc asked aplenty about that part, but I got lost in the brush right off—anyhow, they pieced it out and took off for earth. Buckton and six others, there were, come to scout and see what had happened back here. They was a longspell on the way, and here they were.

"But where are we?" Buckton asked.

"Just west of the Platte," Doc told him. "Our group is located across the river, to the east of here."

And he told him how many we were, and about the other lodges we knew or reckoned tell of, and how we made out. And about the game, and how we lived; the hunting and fishing and trapping and trading and all.

Buckton kept asking the questions now, and no matter what Doc told him, he said, "Incredible," which means, near as I can figger from the way he used it, "Well, I'll be goddamned."

Then it was *our* turn to say it, because we come to the rocket ship. Called it a ship, but it was no more proper boat than it was anything else. Didn't even look like the *pictures* of ships in Doc's books. More like a big bullet with fins on, stood up on end with a metal door to it that opened up so's you could mosey into a lodge. No sense fixing to tell what was inside—reckon nobody'd believe it anyway. But this child saw it, and he's not making brag.

Anyways, we met up with the other three in the rocket and all of us settled down for a palaver. They didn't squat rightly; had some metal contraptions to ease their rumps into. Didn't talk rightly, either, and as for chawing! They passed out what they called coffee and I couldn't go it. Had the taste of hot painter-water, and even Doc set it aside.

But Doc seemed to know about most of this doing, and so did Iron Head, even if he froze over. I kept waiting for the game to flush, and it did.

Buckton said, "This is wonderful! From what you tell us, we'll have no trouble at all. We've got light cruising gear, and of course we intend to survey as much of the area as we can. But if things are as you say, that's almost unnecessary. We can return, make a report, and implement other ships for a full-scale landing."

"Don't know as I follow you,"

Doc said.

"Isn't it obvious? We're coming back! Look—according to the latest survey, we number in excess of forty thousand. We've got technicians, and can train more. Excellent data on microfilm covering the field. All we need to do is go into the ruins and rebuild. We can set up the factories again, get transportation in order—communications, too. We'll use your group, every group we can find; we need plenty of manpower. Of course, we're prepared to set up a fiscal system and restore governmental control. I presume there are other men like yourself scattered around the country; men who have sufficient intelligence and elementary education to assist us. You'll be a great help."

"Will we?" Doc asked.

"Why not? Surely you can see the advantages. It's going to be like pioneering days all over again for a while, but modern technology is on our side. In a generation or so we should be able to restore the world to where it was before the war."

"Suppose our people don't want it that way?" Doc spoke out. "Suppose they like things this fashion?"

"Don't worry, we'll educate them to the advantages," Buckton said. "And there's more than one way of dealing with savages. We've no atomic weapons, of course, but we're well armed. And the next ships can bring the necessary bacterial cultures—just in case of emergency, you understand."

"I understand," Doc said. And he fetched a sigh.

"Well, don't look so down in the mouth about it," Buckton told him. "This is a great day. It's the beginning of a fresh start for earth. You should be proud, as I am proud, of an opportunity to participate."

The book-talk made my skullbones ache, and Doc wasn't looking sassy, either. "Only a generation or so until we're back to where we were before the war," he muttered. "But what assurance have you we can just stop there? This country's rich again—rich in natural resources. Timber, game, minerals. There'll be trouble."

Lieutenant Thorne laughed. "Not under proper control," he said. "We won't repeat our mistakes. We've learned the errors of democracy. Men have become civilized at last."

"Strange." Buckton shook his head. "We've gone so far in three generations on the moon. And you have relapsed into such barbarism. Living like mountain men and Indians." He cocked an eye at Iron Head. "I mean—"

"You mean no races," Iron Head

said. "No creeds. No money. No taxes. No war. No economic problems. No greed, no intolerance, no worship of dollars or machines. Just freedom and plenty for all. That's barbarism. Also happiness."

"He talks!" Lieutenant Thorne said.

"Sure, I talk. I talk book-English and I talk heap plenty *pidgin*, too. I live in one world, but I've read about the other. Enough to be sure that I prefer the world I live in."

Buckton nodded at me. "And you?" he asked. "What do you think? Remember, you're a white man—not a savage."

I scratched my thatch. "Ain't much difference atween the two, I figger. Anyways, Iron Head's right. We got all we can ever use. No ruckus, nothing this child's agin."

Buckton shrugged. "I can't understand it," he said. He looked at Doc. "How could you permit such a state to exist? You say there are others like you in settlements scattered all over. Men with books, men with background and comprehension. Surely you could have done something to keep things going. Education, reclamation. What became of the railroads, the telegraph, telephone, radio? Why haven't you gone down into the cities, rebuilt? Why this—this—"

He got so red, looked as if he'd swallered a hornet. Doc sort of grinned.

"I talk to other men from other settlements," he said. "Iron Head and Jake don't know this, but we get together for meetings regularly, once a season or so. And we've considered a lot of possibilities. The railroad tracks are still here, but they're overgrown. Telegraph and telephone poles went down a generation ago. The cities are ruins. We send in to the arsenals from time to time for ammunition and that's about all."

"Now I understand," Buckton said. "You lack the equipment, the engineering facilities. Well, we'll provide that. You'll be surprised how quickly we can get things running again."

"But the education," Lieutenant Thorne busted in. "Why didn't you combat this savagery?"

"Because it survived," Doc told him. "When the educated men took the world into war, they died. The strays, the outcasts, the remnants of atavistic social orders proved their fitness then. They lived in harmony with Nature. We've encouraged that, since then. If a man like Jake prefers illiteracy, that's his business. The important thing is that Iron Head and Jake and I, and all those like us or unlike us, have managed to exist in

peace together. To me, that's true progress."

"Buckton stood up. "Then I take it you're not in sympathy with our plans? You have no intention of collaborating in reclaiming the world?"

"Nobody reclaims the world," Doc said. "Because nobody had a right to claim it in the first place. Not governments or priests or money-lenders or scientists or engineers. It belongs to everyone. That's the way I think, and Iron Head and Jake and all of us. And so do others in our settlement, and all the settlements. You'll find that out."

"We intend to." Buckton nodded at Lieutenant Thorne and the others. "Tomorrow we'll cross the river and talk to your people. Then we'll head on and visit elsewhere. We'll survey the cities, go east. Maybe we'll find sentiment as you say it is. But it doesn't matter. Because we'll come back. We'll come back with the right men and the right weapons.

"You can't turn back the clock, you know. Once before this was a wild frontier until progress came. You know what happened then."

"Yes." Iron Head stood up, too. "Buffler died. My people died. Everything died but white men. So they ended up killing each other. Progress stinks!"

Buckton got riled, then. "All right. I guess we know where we stand, then. And under the circumstances, you'll realize it will be necessary for me to detain you here until we've investigated your settlement—"

Doc shrugged. "I expected as much."

"What does he mean, Doc?" I asked.

"He means we're prisoners," Doc told me.

Then I got the drift of it. Buckton gave a signal and the men eased around behind us, two to each. They all had these pesky little guns out.

Doc looked at me and I looked at Iron Head, and he said, "Let's raise hair."

So I tromped out and caught the nearest tad on the shinbone and then I twisted the gun up and like to blast his head off. Other one let fire but only singed me, and I took and threw him up agin Lieutenant Thorne. Doc was clubbing with his rifle when Buckton come nigh, but he didn't have to stop—Iron Head broke him in half over one of them metal rump-holders. That left two, and we just took aim and let the rifles chaw guts.

It was powerful smokey in there when we finished, and Iron Head didn't really get riled when Doc

stopped him from counting *coup*.

So we left them with hair after all and just hightailed it out of there.

The ship, or rocket, or whatever it was, looked mighty peaceful in the moonlight. I squinted up.

"Reckon they really come from there?" I asked Doc.

"That's right, Jake."

"Allow as they'll ever send another ship down?"

"Doubt it, if this one doesn't come back."

"Wonder what them hosses from across river will say when they set eyes on this contraption. Figger any of them will get ornery on account of thinking we did wrong?"

Iron Head grunted. "Maybe they no see it."

Doc and I looked at each other. That was Injun-talk, for fair, and straight talk, too.

We knew what to do.

We headed west again and come to the buffalo herd. It was a long hike back, singing all the way. Songs like WHEN IRISH EYES ARE SMILING and ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND and the only one that ever makes sense to me, the one with the words a man can understand—HOME ON THE RANGE. I guess we sang that one pretty near all the way.

Then we got through the herd, rumbling and restless-like in the dark, and come out the other side.

We fanned.

Then we let fly. We loaded and reloaded, and we kept it up until they were on the run. All of them, a million of them, heading east away from the guns and the noise.

We run after.

But you couldn't keep up, not with a million buffalo, a million of them roaring and charging and pouring over the ridge and down into the valley. Into the valley where the rocket pointed at the sky.

All we could do was to get to the top of the ridge in time to see it happen. They didn't stop for the rocket, of course. They kept on going. The moon was bright now, and this child could see everything plain. This child saw them hit the rocket.

Their hoofs made powerful thunder, and then there was a crash when a thousand hit the side of the rocket and a hundred thousand came on behnd, driving them through.

One minute the rocket stood there, like a big bullet—and the next minute, the bullet exploded. This child's never seen sight or heard sound to match. It was something to shake the sky.

Doc and Iron Head and me, we dropped in our tracks and closed our eyes agin the light. It

rained buffalo meat and hunks of metal.

"They brought explosives," Doc said.

"Sure," Iron Head grunted. "That white man's burden."

I stood up again, watching the critters wheel and fan out for the river.

"Come on," I hollered. "They'll make for the river from the lodges to get meat, now. We better hump along and help.

So we did, and that was the end of it.

Doc and Iron Head and this child let on that it was one of them meteors that fell and exploded, and there weren't a contrariwise notion, ever. Because the rocket was gone. Nothing but a big burned-out hole in the prairie.

Like I say that was two-three seasons back. I been across just lately, and I see the grass is coming in again. It'll be right pretty in another season or so.

Meantimes, the buffalo are grazing over the plain, like they used to do in the old days.

It's a mighty peaceful sight.

THE END

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THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

THE "Progress Report," issue #1, but actually the second issue since the first was the special issue, arrived shortly after the first of the year. It sports a beautiful three color illustration on the cover. This is the progress bulletin of our big convention to be held Labor Day in Cleveland. It's the 13th World Science Fiction Convention, that perpetual miracle of an annual convention put on by fandom, which is not an organized club, and does not have officers or anything approaching the concept of a club. You become a stf fan merely by deciding you are one. You quit by — well — you quit . . . I guess you can't quit. Once the stf bug bites you you're bit. So do your bit and send two bucks to Nick Falasca, 13th World Stf Convention, P. O. Box 508, Edgwater Branch, Cleveland 7, Ohio, and get your membership card in the convention. You'll have to anyway when you get to Cleveland, so do it now when you can spare the money.

Dr. Isaac Asimov has been chosen guest of honor, and a better choice couldn't have been made. The program is taking shape, and should be on oiled hinges by Labor Day at this rate. No last minute "We gotta get busy!" stuff for Cleveland. It's going to be held at the Manger Hotel. This issue of the bulletin shows pics of a typical room, the Mather Room, and the Grand Ballroom. It won't cost you so much this year. Rooms run from five bucks for singles to nine for doubles. Since meals in the hotel run from $1.15 to $2.75, the banquet shouldn't be one of those five-fifty stick-ups with a buck's worth of food like we've been getting the past few years. Oh oh. I spoke too soon. I see it says they "decided on Roast Prime Rib of Beef with a price tag of $5.00, including tax, waiter's gratuities, etc. ." I think I will find the best joint in town, complete with orchestra, and order a *real* meal of my own choice, complete with good service, special treatment, and entertainment, for three bucks; anybody want to join me? I can't understand a mass production roast beef dinner at a sched-

uled hour with no ordering, no individual consideration of each customer, costing twice as much as it should, but it seems to every year. One thing is different though; "the hotel has graciously permitted us to keep open ALL NIGHT (Midnight until 6 A. M. or so in the morning) a large room for Bull Sessions." Thanks. I really feel welcome. I hope the night clerk isn't annoyed if I sneak out for a walk after midnight. But I suppose I shouldn't gripe. Hotels have to run all year on what they make on the Labor Day weekend, I guess. Wish I owned a slice of a convention hotel. We spend between twenty and thirty thousand dollars, all told, at the convention hotel each year — and get robbed on the banquet, told to go to bed, and made about as welcome as the man who came to dinner. Oh well . . .

Now to something cheerful. (Wait while I bring out my Paul Coates disguise.) A letter from Jim Harmon again. He says.

Dear Rog:

I was drunk when I wrote you my last letter and you quoted four lines of it in print. I am sober this time so you will probably ignore me. That's the kind of guy you are, Rog—you take care of your own.

Soberly,
Jim Harmon
427 E. 8th St.
Mt. Carmel, Ill.

Tell you what I'll do, Jim. I'll let you buy me a drink at the convention. Okay? — Rog

He brings up two subjects, one of which (Cal Beck) he knows nothing about. The other is a moot question. The subject of who gets what money from the annual convention. He states, "The convention committee should issue a full sworn and accurate financial statement of loss or gain, and any profit should be turned over in full to the next convention committee." Could be. That's outside the province of this department or this magazine. I doubt that any city has made money on the convention, but I wouldn't know. Second on the subject of conventions, "Convention programs should be left partly open, not filled exclusively with local talent or big names pledged to come. One fair way to handle the program is to have at least one round-table discussion at each session with participants nominated from the floor and voted on by acclamation."

You'd be surprised, Jim, how hard it is to fill a program. Even when it's filled, some of those scheduled don't show up at the last minute, or can't be found if they are there. But why don't you speak up where — and only where — it can count; at the convention itself? Tell you what — I'll buy *you* a drink at Cleveland. Okay? Okay.

We come now to the strange and baffling case of Mr. Beck and the somewhat mythical American Science-Fiction Association. It would seem that members of a club accused of being non-existent would voluntarily write, making a lie of the charge. None have.

In view of Joe Gibson's charge that the ASFS (American Science-Fantasy Society) has no members and is a figment of Calvin Beck's imagination, and the signing of his letter containing that charge by eight well known New York fans, I decided to investigate. That investigation so far has taken three months and piled up over thirty thousand words of correspondence, two thirds of which is from Mr. Beck. The investigation is still not complete. I still have not heard from anyone claiming to be a member of ASFS other than Mr. Beck. I asked for, begged for, pleaded for, argued for, and threatened him for the names of ten persons, and their addresses, who were members of ASFS, so that I could get some sort of statement that the ASFS existed, other than Mr. Beck's continuing account of meetings held to discuss the problems involved in giving me such names. Voting on whether to give me the names was scheduled for the next meeting two or three times, according to Director Emeritus Calvin Thos. Beck, Box 497, Hackensack, New Jersey. Each time, in another week or so, I would be informed of the decision. Once under his signature at the end of a letter he typed the names "Directors/officers: Bernard N. Vogel, Roger C. Nelson, Milton Reich." But no addresses. That was the 2,500 word letter which took the position that if ASFS got the bid for a World Con in N. Y. it would be impossible "to appease the distorted and vicarious emotions" of those in the fan groups he had in previous letters and subsequent ones described as communists, perverts, and other things, sometimes by general implication, sometimes by specific charge, naming names. And since he could not associate with these people if they got the bid for the World Con in '56, he believes, "NYC must indefinite forego a world con as it has during previous years."

Finally, just a week ago, on March 11th, Mr. Beck sent me eleven names and addresses, which "Under no circumstances is meant for anyone else's use, information, etc., outside of yourself." The names Vogel, Roger Nelson, and Milton Reich were not on this list. I sent identical letters to each of the names on the list, asking thirteen questions that covered the entire problem. There has hardly been time for replies, as yet, however, I have received replies from two of the names already. These replies

are quite interesting. Neither of them are members of ASFS, neither has ever attended a meeting of ASFS, and are positive that none of the other names on the list whom they know have attended such meetings. ASFS, as far as they have been able to find out, consists of Calvin Beck.

To quote one of them, "There is absolutely no reason why a convention shouldn't be held in N. Y. — as long as Beck doesn't have anything to do with it . . . Let's say I don't dislike him, but I wouldn't trust him."

Why would Mr. Beck give me names and addresses to write to which would bring replies so unfavorable to him? It's an interesting question. Of the remaining nine names to be heard from, two I know definitely are not members of ASFS if it exists outside Mr. Beck's imagination, so that only seven might be members. I will report to you what replies I get from them in the next isue.

I want to emphasize very strongly that I am impartial about who gets to put on the 1956 convention, whether it is New York or Boston or Washington or any other eastern city; but New York and only New York is the victim of a person who uses the mails to destroy individual and collective reputations of people whom I know personally to be decent and undeserving of these attacks. There is no way New York can defend itself against such attacks sent through the mails as things stand, unless I reveal the facts in the CLUB HOUSE, as I am doing, so that *before* you go to the Cleveland convention Labor Day, you will know there *is* a strongly united NY fandom, able to put on a con equal to the best.

Now, before I forget it, I'll review the fanzines. To you who never heard of fandom before, fanzines will come as a surprise — and a pleasant one if you send for one or two of them to see what they're like.

Fan magazines are amateur magazines, mimeographed usually, with from ten to as high as fifty or sixty pages, containing amateur artwork, stories by science fiction fans, often in a purely fannish vein of humor, but just as often serious efforts at top quality fiction, articles about things of interest to stf fans, often taking a year's research for an article only a few pages long.

Fanzines are a labor of love for their editors and writers. You'll realize that when you get one and read it. They cost anywhere from a nickel to thirty-five cents, but their editors are lucky if they break even on expenses.

Fans are a very friendly group of people. You'll like most of them, and if you get into the thick of

things you'll make friends, plenty of them.

Almost any city I go through on my frequent meanderings about the country has a few fans. At the big convention over Labor Day weekend I renew acquaintance with hundreds of old friends that can be your friends too.

So why not join this happy family of kindred spirits, and it is a happy family. In every representative group of people you will find a few who don't seem to feel the spirit of fair play, but in fandom the percentage of those misfits is probably smaller than in most groups.

Do something for me. When you have read the reviews, go back and pick out one fanzine and send for it just for the heck of it. You won't regret having done so. Take it from me . . .

INSIDE: 25c; bi-monthly; "Science Fiction Advertiser"; Ron Smith, 510 West 113th St., Room 407, New York 25, N. Y. Ron and Cindy have moved to New York from Tampa, Florida, so one of fandom's oldest and best photo offset magazines now emanates from there, and will probably do its part to keep fandom informed about NY activities. Roy Squires of Glendale California published this zine for many years, building it up to new highs in quality, contents, and circulation. Ron and Cindy have kept those high standards.

The March 1955 issue of INSIDE & S. F. A. contains an interesting article by Bill Hamling, editor of *Imagination*, replying to an article by Bill Freeman criticizing the editorial standards of *Imagination*, entitled, "They Don't Hardly Write Them No More!" (How did Gobel get in here?) Bill Freeman's article is in the same issue, so evidently Ron sent a carbon of it to Hamling so he could get both articles in the same issue. Freeman's article is entitled, "She Ain't What She Used To Be." Both of them make very good points, and these two articles alone are worth the quarter you pay to get a copy of this March issue. In addition there's a very excellent article, "Gone To The Dogma", by Joe Gibson, which probably points up more of what's wrong with stf today than anything I've read yet. A couple of good short stories, readers' dept., and plenty of ads on stf items make this forty page zine very worth having.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; P. O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, N. J.; fandom's newspaper of pro and fan affairs. Published twice a month. "Seven more British Science-Fiction magazines fold!" "Weird Tales filed bankruptcy on No. 12, 1954!" Those are a couple of the scoops in recent issues. Forry Ackerman has a column, "Farwest Newsfax". Too

bad they don't have a similar "Far-east Newsfax" in it too. The first March issue carries the sad news that Thrilling Wonder and Fantastic Story "fold" by combining with Startling.

PEON: 20c; quarterly; Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Connecticut. Eighth year of publication. Riddle is a navy officer, and started Peon when he was in Hawaii. This is the Feb. 1955 issue. Dave Mason, of N. Y.'s Fanarchists, has a story in this issue that really surprised me. I had no idea he could write. It's a time travel idea with an original twist. The story would have sold to nine out of ten prozines. Bob Bloch discuses "Pruriency, Anyone?" Bob Bloch lives in Weyauwega Wisconsin. I went up that way for a visit last winter, letting Greyhound take the risks, rather than "Roger's DeSoto" (which is my new name for my car and has nothing to do with the Roger De Soto who writes the fan Column in *Amazing*, and who for some reason thinks Bob Bloch lives in Bloomington, Illinois) and to while away the time on the bus I cooked up a plot about a switchboard girl at the Weyauwega Lumber Co., who, to while away the time, pronounced Weyauwega differently on every phone call. "Wauyawayga Lumber Company . . ." "Weeyawhooga Knotworks, Incorporated . . ." I was having a great time all by myself. Then the bus stopped and I wasn't sure where I was, so I quickly asked someone if this was Way-ya-wauga. *Darned* if I could think of Weyauwega . . .

Sam Sackett gives "A Reconsideration of S. F. Ideas" which has some good points. "Straight" man Jim Harmon, in his regular column, "Harmony," discusses the art of not attending a convention. T. E. Watkins, in his column "Kan Kan Kabitzer," analyzes Isaac Asimov's recent slow burn at unfavorable reviews of his books by Henry Bott in *Imagination*. There's also notes on forthcoming conventions, only one of which will be timely when you read this: the Oklacon, scheduled for July 4th weekend. Contact Don Chappell, 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa, if you want to attend.

HARK: 5c; Randy Brown, 6619 Anita St., Dallas 14, Texas. Dallas to doughnuts you'll want this fanzine. It's getting really good. He's still coping with several problems an editor has to face, but he's mastered the production problems. Ditto duplication with here and there some two color experiments in artwork. He won't be able to keep the price at a nickel though, and his next issue, scheduled for April, will be 30 to 40 pages, and cost 15c. He's getting some names on the contents page too. Jerry Lofland, Jan Sadler, Warren Dennis, Noah McLeod, and Ron Ellik, plus a

small art folio by Ross Storey. Good entertaining writing.

SAUCERIAN: 35c; Spring 1955 issue; Gray Barker, Box 2228, Clarksburg, W. Va. I received a letter on this zine typical of many that I get. In spite of my placing the address where the zine can be obtained directly after the name and price, I get letters saying, "I read your review of Blank magazine. Would you please tell me where I can obtain a copy?"

Sixty-two pages, photo-offset, with plenty of photos. Feature article is an editorial about Dr. Laughead and Dorothy Martin and their prediction I would be all washed up, along with three million other Chicagoans last fall. (Little does the world know it was *I* who saved it from destruction by firing the saucer pilots who planned this sewered play.) A picture of a flying saucer taken by Adamski is reproduced on page 36, and beside it is a picture of a Chrysler hub cap that is almost identical. So *that's* what flying saucers are! There's too much in this zine to really begin a review. It isn't a fanzine, really, but so many stf fans are interested in flying hub caps — I mean saucers — that I review it.

FEMZINE: 10c; Eva Firestone, Box 515, Upton, Wyoming. Whattayaknow! It's published in Scotland or someplace now, with femmes from Scotland (Ethel Lindsay), England (Frances Evans), Joan Carr, et al. (Hope al enjoys being et.) The men get into the letter column. These girls really have fun in their zine. You'll have fun reading it, too.

ISFA: 15c; sponsored by the Indiana Science Fiction Association; Edward McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Ind. . Mimeographed, with a fancy cover of yellow heavy paper. The Feb. issue. This is a typical fanzine, with artwork, three stories, a poem, an article on *Astounding*, book reviews, letter column, and fanzine reviews.

EISFA: 5c; Eastern Indiana S. F. A.; Robert and Juanita Coulsen, 626 Court St., Huntington, Indiana; March 1955 issue. A hilarious (to me) article by Joe Hensley tells "How To Get Along With Pros." The Emily Post of fandom. Opening gambits he suggests are, "I know a writer like you must have hundreds of stories around that didn't sell. How about letting me have five or ten for my fanzine?", or, pick out one particular story of the pro that you didn't like, and jump on it with both feet within ten seconds after you meet him. Of the stories, "Last Trip to Mars", by Dan Lesco is the best in this issue. The illos and artwork are very good, and good samples of artwork on stencil.

EPITOME: 5c; Mike May, 9428

Hobart St., Dallas 18, Texas. Issue no. 4. Mimeographed, blue-green paper that's easy on the eyes. There seems to be a nice group growing in Dallas. Mike, Randy Brown with his fanzine, *Hark*, George Jennings, Orville Mosher. In this issue Rob Ellik discusses fanzines of the "Amateur Press Association" type. The APAs are a unique group in fandom. They publish fanzines only for the members of their APA, and the main requirement for being a member is to publish, so that if the member doesn't put out so much material a year he doesn't fulfill activity requirements, and is dropped. Ron calls APA publications dull, and some of them are. I belonged to FAPA years ago, and some zines were filled with nothing but reviews of all the zines in the last mailing — which is like a group of people taking in one another's laundry for a living. Everybody reviews what everybody said in the last mailing about what was in the mailing before that. Once in a while something fresh breaks the monotony, but not often enough. (Could be different with the current APA's, I don't know.) Some excellent book reviews, and various fannish items including a letter section.

IT: 25c; Walter W. Lee, Jr., 1205 S. 10th St., Coos Bay, Oregon. Issue 5, Spring, 1955. A 54 page ditto job, very well done. Featured this time is an 18 page checklist of Science-Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror films complied by Walter W. Lee Jr. himself, and in glancing it over it seems it takes in foreign as well as U. S. films — like this item; "Lured by a Phantom" France 1910. Hmm . . . There are seven Mad-something films listed. Mad Doctor, Paramount 1941, with Basil Rathbone and Ellen Drew. Mad Doctor of Market St., Universal, 1942. Mad Genius, Mad Ghoul (wonder what he's mad about? No friends?) Mad Love, with Peter Lorre, Mad Magician, and Mad Monster. Farther down on the same page is Magnetic Monster. I'd like to see some of those films. Several hundred listed.

In addition, this issue of IT has six short stories, four other articles, and regular departments. While we're that far west we'd better take a look at

CRY OF THE NAMELESS: 10c; Box 92, 920 Third Ave., Seattle 4, Wn. The "Nameless Ones" are an active fan group. Evelyn Stroud is president, Burnett Teskey secretary. Minutes of the meeting occupy two of the sixteen pages. There seems to be a revolving editorship of this fanzine. I would say that if you live near Seattle it's for you. Otherwise not.

NITE CRY: 10c; 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa, Okla. Don and Evelyn Chappell. Jan. issue. Don is in Endicott, N. Y., at Lawton, leav-

ing Evelyn to run off the copy, hand feeding and hand cranking the old AB Dick Mimeo. Dan McPhail helped out by writing the editorial. Twenty-five half-size pages full of plenty of interesting items. "Smoke Signals," by Dan McPhail, continues the report on the past; this time 1936-39. "Ebb Tide" is the letter column, and carries on the discussion raging over the censure of Oklahoma for having a convention last Labor Day "in competition" with Frisco. I doubt that the Oklacon hurt the Friscon, and I doubt that the censure will hurt Oklahoma.

Running off Nite Cry must have given Evelyn the bug again, because here she is with her own zine,

VOILA: 5c; Apt. 11, 2645 E. 7th St., Tulsa, Oklahoma. In the editorial she states that Voila will stress fiction and articles dealing with fantasy and the weird field, with no stf unless it is really tops in quality. She has another policy that I like very much — brief word sketches of the authors in the issue.

FREIBERG'S MAGAZINE: 15c; Feb.; 5369 W. 89th St., Oak Lawn, Illinois, 21 pages this issue. It's always fun reading this zine. "Metempsychosis" by Michael Maher takes the cake this time. "My Continence" by Gertrude M. Carr, to quote Freiberg, is "Passion, crushed by act of will, gives out a strange, rare Spice!" Six items this time, and a large improvement over previous Freiberg productions.

OBLIQUE: 15c; Clifford Gould, 1559 Cable St., San Diego 7, Cal. . Second issue. Only fourteen pages. but with a very unusual cover in black and silver. Three short stories and three articles.

ACTIFAN: 10c; Maŭrice Lubin, 14, Jones St., Worcester, Mass. a quarter-page size mimeoed 26 page job with a two color cover. It's the successor to "Tentacle," and is a nice little fanzine you'd enjoy getting. Most interesting item is "S-F in Argentina" by Richard Albert Ertl.

GASP!: no price listed; Gerald A. Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ont., Canada. "This magazine just will not die," it states. No reason why it should. Plenty of humor. "Hoaxes are Easy", Mars is Heaven?" by Norman Clarke. and "The Last Moan", which seems to be the editorial. make this zine worth twice the money.

(I've been saving the best fanzine for the last.) Here it is . . .

ALPHA: Vol. 1, no 8. U. S. representative, Dick Ellington, 171 St. Marks Ave., Brooklyn 38, N. Y. Published in Holland by Dave Vendelmans and Jan Jansen, near Antwerp in Borgerhout. It's mostly British, with well known names

like Ashworth, Smith, White, et al.

That prediction of Doom last fall must have had Europe quite nervous, what with Chicago about to be flooded and all. Jan Jansen put off doing his article, "The Last Page" in the hopes of not having to write it, since the World *might* end. He says, "As it happens, the prophecy must have made quite a lot of people look like fools, and here's one trying to recover the time spent going out, drinking, and reading things like Reveille. Not that I'm not glad about the whole thing . . ." The back page cover is another one of those large groups of fan-like characters with beanies, sleeves rolled up, all doing different things very matter-of-factly—this time defending a beach against a big battleship, with everything from slingshots to machineguns, not leaving out bows and arrows and flared muskets.

"All Night Party" by Mal Ashworth is terrific. You have to read this zine to get the wealth of dry wit in it. Maybe some of it not so dry, such as "Well, Bob, to use an American slang expression, "You sure slobbered a bibful." In other words there's food and drink in this missile of yours."

And on that note I'll sign off. Send your fanzines for review either to the editorial office or to my home address at Apt. 308, 6613 So. Normal, Chicago 21, Illinois.

—ROG PHILLIPS

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When the professor took his stand at the bridge, you might have been tempted to compare him to Horatius, but there was a much better comparison right at hand.

AT THE BRIDGE

By

George H. Smith

"FLASH!" The Signal Corps radio broke the silence of the aircraft spotter post, "Flash. Five UFO's passed over Acton at zero five three five, course one eight zero, speed approximately one five five zero."

Professor Carson Graves looked at young Billie Jones who was standing by the radio in the absence of the regular operator. They both turned quickly as a man in white overalls burst into the post.

"I saw them. I tell you, I saw them! They landed out at MacKinnen's farm," the gas station attendant shouted pushing his face close to that of Professor Graves. "I tell you I saw them get out of their ships and start down the highway toward Bedford. They look awful . . . like a bunch of big red crabs only they move faster."

"You ain't been drinking that homemade stuff again have you, Ben?" Billie asked.

"So help me, professor, I ain't had a drink in weeks."

"Flash. Flash. All Spotter posts. This is the Area Commander speaking. Large numbers of unidentified flying objects have been reported passing over . . ." the voice was interrupted by the waves of static which had been affecting the voice radio. " . . . may have landed near . . . . . all stations should go on full emergency basis."

Professor Graves picked up his field glasses and went out on the watcher platform.

"Hello. Hello. All stations. All stations this circuit. The Fourth Interceptor Command has just issued a yellow alert . . . ." the voice trailed away into static.

"There seems to be something going on," Graves suggested mildly to Miss Timkins who stood on the platform staring into the morning

mist.

"There does," Miss Timkins said tersely. She wasn't angry but she had read somewhere that New England spinsters were sparing of words. "There's a fire out there."

The professor wished his eyes were as good as the woman's. He couldn't see anything through the fog.

"Right there . . . by the Bedford highway."

Yes, yes there was a red glow in the sky. He adjusted his field glasses and looked again. It must be quite a large fire to show through the fog that way. He wondered if it had anything to do with those crazy things Ben was yelling about.

"I tell you I saw them!" Ben was still raving. This time to the highway patrolman who had just come into the building. "They were moving down the highway, must've been fifty of them . . . ."

As the professor returned to the shack the patrolman jangled the telephone hook. ""What's the matter with this damn thing? I can't even get the operator."

"Is something wrong?" Graves asked.

"Sure something's wrong. I tell you there's monsters on the turnpike," Ben was still babbling. "I tell you, officer, I saw them with my . . . ."

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. I saw them myself. They burned my car and killed my partner. I've got to get through to headquarters or to the chief of-police in town."

"Professor Graves! Professor Graves!" Billie shouted. "We're being invaded . . . it's Martians or something. A bulletin just came over the radio from Washington."

"Oh. Oh my. Why did it have to happen on my watch?" The professor took off his glasses and polished them nervously.

"They've bombed New York and Chicago and are landing all around here," the boy went on.

The state trooper cursed fluently. "No wonder this damn telephone has gone out. I'll have to hike into town."

"I knew something was gonna happen. I knew it. I should've brought along my jug," Ben said as he crouched in a corner of the shack.

Miss Timkins came into the room pulling off her gloves and coat. She looked grim but Graves wondered if she ever looked anything but grin. "Where's our relief? Late, as usual?"

"We're being invaded," Billie said.

"That's no excuse for inefficiency," the woman said. "There's people coming down the turnpike and crossing the bridge," she continued, "Lots of people."

The professor took his glasses and went back out onto the plat-

form. Miss Timkins had understated the situation as he had suspected. There were thousands of people on the highway. There were a few nearby crossing the bridge but most of them were farther up the road. Cars, trucks, wagons and people walking, all coming from the same direction and crowding each other close as they came in toward town.

The fog had lifted and he could see fires in at least three directions and the largest seemed to be just where he knew Bedford to be.

"Those people are running from something," Miss Timkins said from the doorway. "I don't approve of it at all. It's undignified."

"Maybe they've got a right to run. If you'd seen what I did . . . ." Ben said from behind her as he tried to see over her shoulder.

"Listen. There's planes overhead," the patrolman searched the sky with his eyes shielded from the morning sun.

"Yes. Yes," the professor agreed. "They're over toward Acton. Jets . . . . at least a dozen of them and flying low."

"There's something else over there also," Miss Timkins pointed with a thin, well cared for hand.

"A flying saucer. *A flying saucer!*" Graves surprised himself by the shout. Billie came running from the shack and and kept jumping up and down in his excitement.

"Look at the jets go after that saucer . . . they're shooting. Gee, professor, you'll be able to *write* history now instead of teaching it. History's going on right around us."

"History is always going on, my boy. It never stops."

"Well, we ain't doin' so well in this history," Ben said suddenly, pointing to where two of the planes fell away from the silver disc. One fluttered earthward for a few seconds and then burst into flames. The other glided down behind some trees before exploding. The other planes dropped the pursuit and the saucer craft disappeared to the west.

"Disgraceful! Simply disgraceful!" Miss Timkins said. Her tone made the professor wonder if she meant the invader's destroying of the planes or the inefficiency of the air force in allowing its planes to be shot down. He rather suspected the latter.

"Look. Here comes Mr. OLeary," Billie said.

"Well, it's about time," Miss Timkin sniffed. "Where are the rest of them? I declare it's enough for one to do one's patriotic duty and spend two hours here without having Mr. Dudley and Mrs. Martin always late in taking over."

O'Leary, the town's red-faced

chief watcher and leading druggist, always made a hard job of climbing the ladder up to the spotting post. He arrived at the top breathing heavily.

"Well, Mr. O'Leary, I should think that as our head aircraft spotter you might at least . . . ." Miss Timkins began.

"Where are the others?" Billie asked.

O'Leary sat down to catch his breath. "They've gone . . they've . . left town . . . like everybody . . else," he said between gasps.

"Do you mean to tell me that the people of this town are running away?" Miss Timkins demanded.

"Look at the road," O'Leary said pointing. It was crowded with farmers and townfolk. Trucks and cars were piled high with household goods. Those families without cars were walking.

"Everybody's running and I can't say I blame them," O'Leary continued. "Did you hear what they did to Acton? They wiped it off the face of the earth."

"Gee, they did?" Billie's eyes were huge. "Where are they from? Are they Martians?"

"The mayor is trying to get everyone out of town as soon as possible. I came to tell you folks. No one knows what these things are or where they came from but nothing seems able to stop them."

"So they want us to run." Miss Timkins drew about her the full dignity of her seventy years. "I shall stay at my post until relieved."

"Now, Miss Timkins, that ain't no attitude to take. The Chief of Police says that there's soldiers coming from the city and as soon as they get here things will be different."

"Let's get going. Let's get out of here," Ben said as he and Billie headed for the ladder.

"Perhaps someone should stand by the radio and telephone," Professor Graves said. His voice produced a quaver which he found disquieting.

"There's no point in watching for airplanes when an army of invaders have already landed," O'Leary said, urging Miss Timkins toward the ladder.

The regular commercial radio had been off the air for half an hour but now it let out a squawk and an excited voice broke in, "We now bring you this bulletin from Washington. The President has requested that the people of the New England area in which the space invaders have landed remain calm. The armed forces are moving with all possible speed to control the situation. Troops and planes are being rushed to the scene of the landings and the invaders are being counterattacked."

"Come on, professor, let's get out of here," Billie called from the

foot of the ladder.

"Citizens are requested to do everything they can to aid the military. Roads should be kept open so that armored vehicles can move. Do not panic. Remain calm. The invaders are not in large numbers and are being surrounded."

The professor and O'Leary helped Miss Timkins down the ladder and followed Billie and Ben out onto the crowded road.

Half an hour later they were pushing across the bridge in the middle of a mob of townspeople and farmers. Professor Grave's eyes were on the sparkling water of the little river and his thoughts were in the past. Suddenly he stopped and pulled away from O'Leary.

There were state troopers and policemen armed with rifles and submachine guns scattered about on either side of the bridge. The professor could see the Chief of Police among them and he fought his way toward them.

The Chief of Police and the mayor who was standing beside him looked at Graves as they might an escaped lunatic as he shouted, "We can't all run! We've got to hold the bridge!"

He was holding up traffic now and car horns began blowing, people were yelling and pushing. "Keep moving, mister."

"You're holding things up!"

"Keep moving, mister!"

"Them Martians is only a few miles away."

"What are you talking about," the Police Chief demanded.

"It would be a symbol . . . a symbol for the American people. Look. A lot of the men have guns, rifles and shotguns. Maybe we could stop the invaders until the army gets here."

Miss Timkins and Billie stopped beside the professor.

"Well, I'm glad someone is showing a little courage," the spinster said.

"Look now, Professor Graves, you're too intelligent a man to make trouble at a time like this," the mayor said. "I know a lot of people are cracking up but not you."

"I am in complete control of my senses, sir. I tell you that we should not panic. We should prove that the people of 1967 are as brave as those of . . . ."

"Come on, fellow, get out of the way!" A big man in working clothes pushed against the professor. Graves looked at him, looked at the suitcase he held in one hand and at the shotgun in the other. He looked at the pale woman who clung to his arm and at the child clutching her hand.

"Are you going to let a bunch of things that look like red-backed crabs drive you out of your own town?"

"What'ya mean?"

"Listen to me. Listen to me everybody! If you panic and block the roads, the military can't move troops, can't get here. Don't jam the roads. Stay here and fight!"

Most of the crowd pushed on and the crush at the bridge thinned out but several men stopped to listen. Two students from the university recognized the professor and came over to join him. Seven boys in National Guard uniforms with rifles but without officers or orders stopped. A farmer sent his family on in his new Cadillac but climbed out out himself and came over.

"Mr. Mayor, I beg of you to get the people off the highway. Have them take refuge in buildings or out in the fields. Get the men who are armed together and make a stand."

"Stand, hell!" someone shouted. "Those crabs burned Bedford with some kind of ray. You wanna stand here and get burned too?"

Several men moved on but another National Guardsman with a rocket launcher over his shoulder stopped and leaned against the bridge railing.

"I'll stay! I'll stay and fight!" Billie picked up a gun someone had dropped and waved it over his head.

"Professor, you ain't seen what those things can do." It was the state trooper who had come to the spotter post earlier. "They got tubes that shoot fire or electricity or something. They blew up our car and burned my partner."

"Are you going to let them kill your comrade without fighting back?" Miss Timkins demanded.

"Fighting is for the army," the Chief of Police said.

"New Englanders never stood around waiting for the army to do their fighting in the old days," a farmer said.

Only a small number of stragglers were crossing the bridge now but several hundred people stood about on the other side. Twenty or thirty men had gathered about the professor.

"I, for one, intend to stay here and dispute the passage of this river with the enemy," the professor said.

"What are you going to fight with, Dr. Graves?" one of the students asked.

"With my bare hands, if necessary." Graves could feel his knees getting weak. There was a fire at the other end of town and a queer rumbling noise drifted down with the smell of smoke.

"Here," a man said as he shoved a rifle and a box full of shells into Graves' hand. "You can use this. I'm getting out of here!" He started off at a run with several others at his heels.

Professor Graves looked at the rifle and snapped the bolt clumsily.

The mayor took the gun out of his hands.

"Here, let me show you how to use that before you shoot yourself."

A man came running down the street carrying a bundle of clothes. He yelled omething that they couldn't understand. A police car rounded a corner and headed across the bridge with siren screaming. A score or more state troopers and National Guardsmen on foot followed. The streets behind them were empty and a pall of smoke drifted over the river from the town. The running and yelling man reached the bridge and kept going. The police car skidded to a halt.

"The Martians!" A beefy police sergeant who might have struck terror into the heart of the toughest gangster was trembling, almost unable to talk. "The Martians! In town . . . . burning . . . . heading this way."

"Well, Mr. Mayor?" the Police Chief asked.

The Mayor returned the rifle to Professor Graves, who moved off the bridge with Billie at his side and Miss Timkins behind him. The Professor carefully picked out a commanding position while he tried to remember everything he had ever read in his Herodotus and everything Caeser had written about bridges in the Gallic Wars. He could feel the eyes of everyone on him. The state troopers and guardsmen on the other side of the river were firing down the street and falling back toward the bridge.

"If we're going, we'd better do it," the Police Chief said.

A radio blared in one of the police cars. "It's the army calling, sir," a patrolman said to the mayor. "An armored column is being held up down river by a destroyed bridge. They're requesting information about other bridges."

"All right. All right!" The mayor was perspiring freely now. "Tell them to head this way and we'll try to hold things at this end."

Professor Graves found a comfortable position from which he could rake the bridge with rifle fire and stretched out behind a heavy stone monument. Billie and Miss Timkins crouched beside him. At the mayor's word, the police and remaining citizens took up positions about the bridgehead, behind cars and stone walls, in the upper windows of nearby houses. A truck and several cars were placed to block the bridge.

The guardsmen and troopers on the other side of the bridge were falling back across it and taking up positions with the others. There was an increase in the noise and smoke which drifted downwind. Someone dropped into the place beside Professor Graves. He looked up to see a young Marine corporal.

"This sure is some party, ain't it,

pop?" the Marine said. "I was driving through, heading for my ship in Boston when it all started so I figured I might a well lend a hand."

"Yes, it is quite a party," the professor said and found that he had control of his voice again. He peered into the smoke straining for his first sight of the invaders from space.

"Say, pop, what's the name of this town anyway."

Professor Graves turned to look at him as he answered. "Concord. Concord, Massachusetts."

"Concord, Massachusetts? Seems like I've heard of it before."

"I expect you have," the professor said, looking up at the statue of the Minute Men behind which they crouched, rifles ready. "I expect you have."

THE END

THE END

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Editorial ★

(*Continued from Page* 5

competition has been forced to quit. We started with one magazine and we now have three. And on the overall picture, we are quite content with toast and no butter.

Some time ago, before the market bust, we asked our readers to send in $5.00 subscriptions for 25 issues, so we could go monthly. They responded, and we did go monthly—just in time to get it in the teeth! Now, after some years, those 25-issue subscriptions are expiring. And strangely enough, the same situation faces us. We could solve all our problems, if just those same people would renew. This is the month to do it, and we're asking them to renew—but with one condition: Not if you don't feel that we are presenting a worthwhile magazine with our present issues, and show promise of a better in the future. We want to know that we're good, not just possessed of a lot of good friends.

Bea is handling the stories, and doing all the editing. Your editor writes an editorial, and produces the cover. We rather thought, even for a black-and-white, our last cover was pretty good. We hope this will strike you better (whatever it happens to be!). Maybe in the future we can present those last two Finlay covers in full color as they were intended to be. We've had a lot of requests to do this. Believe us, we're working on it.

This issue, we've begun a new service to subscribers—and it could result in some nice gifts to you. Why don't you get in on the game, and earn yourself some of those tremendous gifts, entirely free? (See page umpteenth.) You'll note that we've made it possible for you to get some real bargains, if you just want to buy. As a matter of fact, if you have anything in mind you are planning to buy, why not ask us how you can get it free for a specific number of subscriptions? You can sell these subscriptions to friends, do them (and us) a favor, and in return, we'll dig deep and show our appreciation with a really worthwhile gift (anything, almost, you can imagine.) Why not contact us and find out how you can get it? We are willing to pay the difference on any nationally advertised item, as a friendly gesture to you, just to get you and your friends on our subscription list.

We need about 5000 readers who get OW regularly in the mail! We want them, if we have to give them a refrigerator! Why not write us and find out how? Take for instance, you are a housewife, and have always wanted a Dormeyer Mixer? Well, you know what they cost: #5001 costs $37.95 when you

buy it in the store. We'll give it to you *free* for 28 $3.00 (12-issue) subscriptions. Why not get out there and earn yourself that mixer (if that's what you want) without a cent of cost to you? Those subscriptions are bargains, too. Each issue costs 25c rather than the 35c at the newsstand.

In a recent issue of *Imagination*, we note that Bill Hamling is giving a terrific offer too. We'd like to top him, and we think we've done it! How about that Lovely Lady compact by Ritz (see it at your department store or jewelry store) *free* with a $5.00 sub? And that goes for renewals also! Or that Evans Lighter, free with a $5.00 subscription? Where can you get such bargains?

Why not do all your gift shopping through our subscription department? Just write us, tell us what you want to earn, or buy, and we'll tell you how you can get it.

At present, we are reading a 90,000 word novel, in three parts, which we are trying to figure out how to present to you. We hope we find out how, as it will make future issues of OW a real demand item. What we'd like to know, from your letters, is just what are your thoughts on long stories? Do you want longer ones, or are shorties your favorite? And whatever else you'd like to see in OW, tell us, and we'll try to do it.

There's not much more we can say in this editorial, due to the confused state we're in, but the *reason* for the confusion is our sudden resolve to put on full power and make OW the best magazine you ever saw. We hope we succeed. Anyway, you just watch us try. And if you care to help out in any way (preferably that good old financial way of subscribing), why, you're certainly welcome!

—*Rap*

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LETTERS

Address:
Editor
Other Worlds
P.O. Box 56, Sta. V
Cincinnati 10, Ohio

Dear Bea,

What th' hell goes on up there? You going broke? The black and white covers, the fewer interior illos, the lower grade paper . . . It broke my heart to see Findlay not in full color. I'll probably sound a lot like Dave Doren in this, but that's about the way I feel.

You started out great with your first two or three issues. The paper was good, and so was the layout. The illo's were terrific. I still think Finlay, Lawrence & Co. are the top artists in the Business. The stories were top-notch too. And then the downgrade. It first came with the ad's cluttering up the interior. They may be essential, but that doesn't make me like them. The one-artist issues, the poorer paper. . . . . .

I see you're going to change the title back to OTHER WORLDS. That doesn't change the fact that Universe is fast becoming the worst mag in the field. That's in makeup and illos already, and going fast in stories.

You don't agree with me on that, naturally, most of the other fans probably don't either. But that's the way I see it, and I'm sorry, because I rated OW and then USF at the top. I'll still buy the mag for yours and Rap's editorials and Rog's Clubhouse, but at the present, that is about all.

Well, I guess that's it. I may sound a little bitter myself. I am. So long for now, and I hope I'll be able to nod my head when I see the new OW.

Barry Gardner
Box 201,
Deport, Texas

P. S. If anyone's interested, I'd like to correspond. I'm not really that nasty.

Going broke? Boy, we went broke, but we're too stubborn to know when to quit. Let's hope stubbborness will see us through the storm, because that's about all

we've got to go on. As for black and white cover, who's got 'em? We have color covers, front and back. We're working hard to bring you better stories and more illos; stick with us, and we won't let you down. —Bea

Dear Bea or Rap,

Your return to the title of OTHER WORLDS is going to foul up the stf collection of my wife and I, since we recently decided that OW was gone for good, and had our collection bound. Oh well. Hope you have enough of an increase in sales to make the title change worth while.

Liked the cover on the #10 UNIVERSE. Did you print the picture backward, or was it really by ligriV yalnif? Martian artists, yet! What happened to your interior illos? They were good enough, but . . . . . only 3 interiors in the whole mag? Surely they don't cost that much.

None of the stories were outstanding, but on the other hand, none of them were crud. They seemed to range from mediocre to above average. I didn't care much for "The Atomic Age Sex Murders." The idea was all right, the title was fine, but somehow it just didn't come off. Probably because of the attempt to tie it in with the cover. Too much of a shift in perspective required of the reader. (Or maybe I was just too tired to shift my perspective the night I read it.)

I seem to disagree with Guy Terwilleger on two items: I like your cover format — though I suppose it will be changed with the change of title — and I intensely dlislike T. P. Caravan. Or at least, I dislike his "old and evil professor" stories; "The Shoemaker Of Lan" was fairly good, although it's the type of story I associate with PLANET. Who is Caravan, by the way? I suspect Rap or Phillips.

Robert Coulson
626 Court St.
Huntington, Ind.

Wish we could take credit for a Martian artist, that would really be a science-fiction dream come true; but, the truth of the matter is that the cover was in better balance with the painting reversed, hence—ligriV yalniF. As for T. P. Caravan, we'll grant you that it's a pen-name, but he's neither Rap nor Rog, and until he wants to unmask, we'll keep his secret. —Bea

Dear Bea and Rap:

We here in Oklahoma appreciated your printing of Don Chappell's letter last fall, when, as president of the Okla. Science Fiction Confederation, he sent you a notice of our "Oklacon." And your gracious contribution of art work for our auction, the proceeds of which helped offset convention ex-

penses.

And this year, speaking as president, I solicit again your aid in the way of art contributions, and ask if the following information could be printed in the letter section:

The Oklacon III of 1955 will be held July 3 and 4th at the Western Village Hotel in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A very interesting program is being developed by a committee headed by Mrs. Dolores Chappell, 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa. Information and/or reservations (the customary $1.00 brings progress bulletins, membership card, etc) can be had from her. All readers of OTHER WORLDS are invited, especially those in the Sooner State and neighboring areas.

And in closing, Bea and Rap, let me say that invitation is especially extended to you two fine friends of fandom and if either or both of you could manage to get down Oklahoma-way next Fourth of July, we'd be mighty proud to have you!

Daniel McPhail
1806 Dearborn
Lawton, Oklahoma

We're always glad to help out a fan convention or conference whenever possible, so we'll look around and see if we can find some illustrations for your auction. Doubt if either Rap or I will be able to attend this year, but we both send our best wishes for a successful con.

—Bea

Dear RAP:

To be very unoriginal, I shall simply state that this is my first letter to an Editor. But, the letter from Jack (The Ripper) Hunter, and your terrific rebuttal, in the May Ish of OW, prompt me to give my all.

First, let me state that I am no new-comer to SF . . . I cut my baby teeth on Tarzan; my eye teeth on War Of The Worlds; my bicuspids on Doc Savage; my molars on Amazing; and am now trying to cut my wisdoms on Galaxy, OW, Astounding, etc . . . . In fact, I still have my copy of the Amazing Ish containing THE SHAVER MYSTERY— and have kept it along with the issues containing Rog Phillip's "So SHALL YE REAP," The Green Man, etc . . . . in spite of many good offers to sell same.

First, may I please explain why I have, heretofore, not taken an active participation in S. F., Letters ond "in person" visits to the CONS? For the past 10 years I have been recuperating from a pneumonectomy caused by adeno carcinoma. In other words, I had cancer of the lung and subsequent removal of same, at a time in medical history when I was a test case — but happily, a successful one.

Now, on to Jack Hunter's blistering blast. I agree on some counts,

mainly that going back to the OW is a great event, and the dropping of your other two, a smart move.

Secondly: Mr. Hunter states "I had faith in you." Well, I still have faith in you. If you will check your records, you will see I have been a faithful and constant subscriber and have followed you hither and yon for many years.

Thirdly, he bemoans the fact or lack of Original Painting Covers. I agree with you, at least so far as I'm concerned, that the covers really make no difference to the content, nor to my buying or not buying same.

Now, as to your terrific rebuttal. First, you dog-gone bet'cha, subjects dealing with the Mystic are just as much an unknown quantity as are speculations re life on any of the planets. To me, it's all Amazing and Astounding. Conjecture on any of these subjects, or themes, is what makes true Science Fiction.

I'd love to take you up on your offer (if I already weren't a subscriber) to do same if only you will get on with your threat and give us fans back the thrills and enjoyment of SHAVER, ROG PHILLIPS, BYRNE et al. Oh, Happy Days!

You bet your life I would like to read the novel you think is the best science fiction ever written, bar none! As for you having plotted many, if not most of Shaver's stories —this fact I have suspected for lo, these many years. But it was great no matter who did it.

You can also bet your last button, I, and many others would buy OW if you ran psychic science stories, along with your regular SF, as they belong together, and the more the merrier. The sooner, the better.

Ray, how about running a Test-Issue? Put out an issue as you have always wanted to. Incorporate, Shaver, Phillips, Byrnes, Mysticism, Fantasy, Science — in fact, the works. Take us back to the Ray Palmer of the greatest mag ever published (for down-right enjoyment) The Amazing Stories. Come on, amaze us — I'll bet my last button that we'll stand behind you. I'll even brave the Dero's wrath and ire; at least my own personal Dero. Put the names (brazenly) of Shaver, Phillips et al, on the covers, and watch your sales go up. Only one word of warning. Publicity. Let your readers and the readers of all SF, know. How? Well, your daring and fertile brain (along with Bea's) can surely conjure up the answer.

Now that I have all that off my chest, I have one big wish and desire. I hope to be able to attend one of the Conventions, and finally get to meet, in person, some of the people who have helped me spend

10 long years in hospitals and in bed, and to thank them personally, for all the enjoyment and happiness they have given this Swede. However, due to the illness itself, added to costly hospital rooms, specialists, ad infinitum, it presented problems. But now, the sky looks blue again, and I'll realize that dream if it is the last thing I do.

I have waited until last to disclose that I am the girl-type fan. I didn't want any prejudice re male and female. Vital Stat's? I'm 25, 5'7, 105 lbs., Swedish, former ballet dancer with the Met. in New York City; won scholarship in English Lit., a Private Secy during war, until illness, and 100% American and proud of it. I am enclosing a snap, U. S. C. rather, in a sealed envelope, because I hope you will read the letter, before finding out I am the femme-type-fanne. I enclose it, only to prove to you, I am not an old dried-up old maid or crackpot. Fair enough? (I'll bet you guessed anyway.)

Thank you, Ray, for wading through this rather long first effort. Thanks, also, for the fun and enjoyment you and your cohorts have given me throughout the years.

Rickey Stromsoe
7825 So. Crocker St
Los Angeles 3, Calif

First, let's tell our readers that Rickey is cover girl material! No wonder she didn't want us to open the envelope in which she enclosed her photo, before we read the letter! But we aren't influenced by that—nosir! Even before Rickey asked us, we had our plans made to give her what she wants. But one thing we want to stress: what we give won't be any rehash, nor will it be a revival of any "mystery." If we give you Shaver, it will be straight Shaver, and his best; and the same for Phillips and Byrne. We're out to make OW the best mag on the stands. Your definition of what is science fiction is a pretty good one. We'd call you a very smart girl! Okay, you'll get that novel! It's 60,000 *words, and OW holds about* 45,000. *Maybe we can get it in by reducing the size of type for one issue. We'll try. If not, we'll give it to you in two parts. Somewhere . . . —Rap. . .*

Dear Rap,

Received the latest issue of OW yesterday. Just glanced through it. Not bad at all. One thing, though, it's not in good taste to knock other s-f mags, such as you did with Madge.

That's not why I wrote, though. The reason is simply this. Besides reading, I collect s-f, as do many fans. Now when you collect, you like to pick and choose meticulously as to the condition of mags purchased. I remember when Math-

eson's "Third From The Sun" came out as a PB. I must have gone to a dozen subway stands in order to find one in half-way decent condition.

Well, yesterday's OW was a disgrace. I have carried mags with me for a week in the rush hours on the subway and they weren't as bad as that. C'mon, men, get on the ball.

Roger Smyth
712 W. 176 St.
New York 33, N. Y.

Bill Hamling, editor of Madge, and I are long-time friends, and this ribbing one another is a long-time joke between us. So don't take it too seriously! As for the bad copy, a new one has been sent to you. —Rap

Dear Rap:

Despite the undeniable fact that a couple of years ago, you earned Peter Hamilton's and my undying gratitude for the free notice you were kind enough to run about the foundation of Nebula SF, that doesn't stop me wanting to wring your neck—at least figuratively. (You may be interested to hear, in case you don't know, that Peter has managed to build up Neb to what a recent poll said was the second most popular of our five flourishing SF magazines, and since the first issue has something like quadrupled the circulation . . .

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single-handed, more or less.)

Last Friday night I went through the November issue of Universe, and I felt that I must take up cudgels against you on two points. The first is a more or less unimportant one. Your particular style of editing caters for quite a wide taste, as evidenced by the circulation of your old magazines—OW and Science Stories—and you pick your material in accordance with that policy. But when the first issue of Universe came to me (I buy the first issue of all the new magazines, and if I like them stick with them) I thought that we had at long last a fourth magazine to put up with the Big Three—ASF,GSF, and F&SF—one which was genuinely of a high literary standard and whose stories were of some real worth. After all, what finer baptism of fire could a magazine have than that superlative tale of Sturgeon's, "The World Well Lost"?

I'm sorry, but we haven't. It's taken another three or four issues to prove that, of course—but as soon as Robert G. Jones put his semi-nude in a swamp on one of your covers, the rot was set in. I have nothing against nudes (at the moment—if you get me). But it is of no use to make pretensions to a decent literary level if you won't implement them with stories to prove them. I would instance Hamilton's tale in No. 7. This is colorful and competent—but utterly forgettable. One can't expect a World Well Lost every time. One doesn't. But stack that one up against Hamilton's "What's It Like Out There?" It's a sad falling-off.

I like space opera—but and still please don't lay claim to a standard of writing which your contents cannot bear out.

The second point is infinitely more important. My personal preferences and prejudices are of no particular consequence — but the article in your eighth issue called "What's Waiting for Russia — Or Mars!" is without a doubt the most dangerous, poisonous and thoroughly unworthy item I have ever read in an SF magazine — and that includes John Campbell's political propaganda. The implied acceptance of an inevitable atomic war and of inevitable American victory smacks of the ridiculous, or would if it were not unusually nauseating. This to me looks peculiarly like the 'capitalistic warmongering' which the Communists are so fond of making accusations about.

I am not a Communist and never have been. I would not have been commissioned in the RAF if I had. But, since I have managed that, it puts me in some slight position to speak on the subject. Sci-

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- - - -

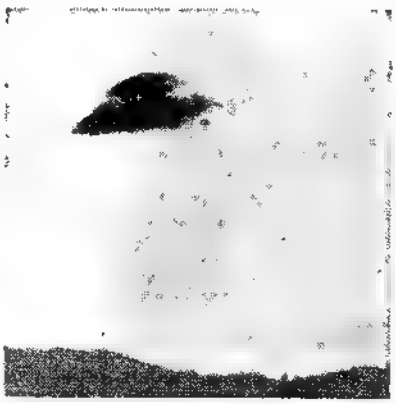
ence fiction is an idealists literature. It must be. It is its only real excuse for existance. If yours is an 'adult realistic' viewpoint (as I have heard it defined), I want none of it. I want myself, as well as my children, to live to a quiet and peaceful old age— and I believe that despite the fact that the holiday is over as regards circulation SF has a small influence in the bringing of that about. We in Britain know more about 'bad' science fiction than you Stateside have ever had nightmares about. We've been deluged with appallingly written material for six or seven years. But *bad,* because it insisted on doing what you imply in this article— extended today's petty foolishness into tomorrow. The stories which you dismiss as case histories from a psychiatrist's file serve a better end than 'No Species Alone'. Humanity is a frail and fallible entity— but it has a disconcerting ability to develop a conscience, and the recognition and enjoyment of stories which do not depict Earthmen as capable of being lifted off the planet in order to embroil some hundreds of worlds in a galactic bloodbath is one sign that that is happening.

I'd very much like to see you defend your views in a future issue of UNIVERSE.

. Pilot Officer J. K. H. Brunner
Officers' Mess
Royal Air Force Bletchley
Bucks, U. K.

Since you ask for a defense, I'll try to give it, although actually I have nothing to defend. First, however, your "Big Three" are all "specialists". Astounding is for the technician; Galaxy is for the "purist"; F&SF is for the "literary". Universe, when it began, was intended to be "class." A combination of all three of the magazines you mention. It flopped. MISERABLY. Oh yes, everybody who wrote us said "This is IT." But in respect to sales, I'll give you the brutal truths: 37% sale. BOTH issues. Then I got hold of it. Before I could get into my own style (I tried to maintain some of the aims of the original publisher), it went down to 32%. But on the "utterly forgettable" issue (as you term it) we made money for the first time! I won't say how much, as it might prove embarrassing, and I won't say to "whom". From now on, sf publishers are going to bewail sales at every opportunity in order to keep any other outsiders from getting the idea it's a good field, and coming into it and ruining it as they did before. I don't claim a standard for UNIVERSE (which by the way is no longer Universe, but OTHER WORLDS). I'm not putting out a "standard" magazine. I'm putting out a magazine for the people who still like a

"Palmer" magazine, and there are more of them than the people who like a "class" magazine. The answer is obvious. If I'm liked, why not sell myself? Obviously you do not like "me." I'm sorry that this is so, but it is a circumstance. I can only earn a living being myself. As an imitation, I am a flop. As for your references to "communism," I am well aware of the British attitude toward saying anything that might offend Moscow. We, over here, tend to be pugnacious to the other extreme, which is equally bad. However, I am neither a "capitalist" nor a "communist." If you want to know what I am, I am a fraternalist. My "religion" is that the only way to "heaven" is to take care of the other guy. It is not important to take care of yourself—because in a fraternal world, you have the other guy looking out for you, which relieves you of the (selfish) responsibility. Oh sure, this idea doesn't work out yet. But someday it will. It means, briefly, giving up everything you have to the other guy—who is still rat enough to TAKE IT. A tough spot to be in, believe me! But, if you British could go ALL the way in your attitude toward Moscow, you'd be in the SAME spot. The Russky is still a rat—the leaders, that is. He'd TAKE you. Over here, we recognize that. But WE aren't rats, and if Moscow decided



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to "give", we wouldn't take. At least I like to think we wouldn't. I believe we couldn't, if the opportunity came. So, your British attitude toward ALL Americans is not exactly fair. No, an atomic war isn't inevitable. It's impossible. We ALL will die if it happens. But it can very well happen, because, as Richard Shaver once said, the radioactives in our brains damage our thinking, reverse it, and the tendency of disintegration is to disintegrate. If we go on increasing the radioactivity in our atmosphere we'll go on thinking more and more destructively. All rational people know that an atom war cannot be won, and even peaceful use of radioactive energy on a large scale is fatal—but there are only a few rational people in the world. Science fiction today is horribly far from idealistic. It predominantly predicts more and more terrible

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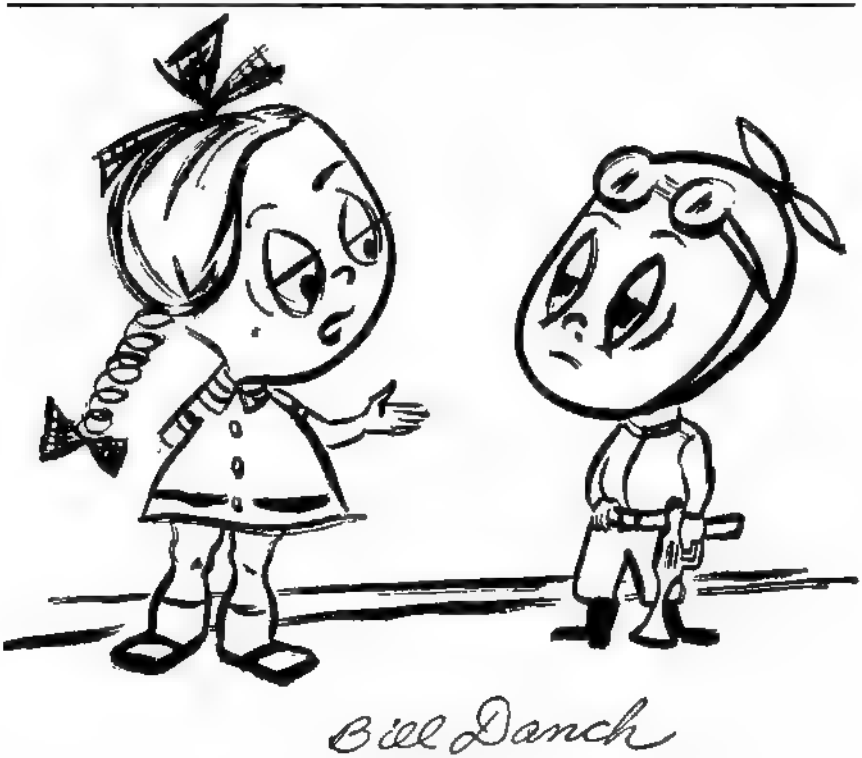

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★ ★ ★

wars and destruction. It hardly knows how to spell the word LOVE. It is psychotic. In OTHER WORLDS, we are trying to be happy, entertaining, unsadistic. Because I do not write all the stories in the magazine, it is very hard to do. NOBODY seems to be writing optomistic stories. —Rap

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INVADERS FROM ANOTHER WORLD

(See Back Cover)

THE most important factor in an invasion is that tremendously difficult problem known as logistics, that military science which embraces the problem of moving, evacuating and supplying armies. In any invasion from another world, it would seem to be 99% of the problem. The weapons and their capabilities for destruction, the army and its capability of occupation, are minor factors. Supplying those weapons, moving those armies, and evacuating them if necessary would involve the bulk of the entire operation.

Let us assume that we are an invading Martian force, determined to land on Earth and to subdue a portion of it. Let us say that we have been assigned the task of occupying the portion Earthmen know as the state of Utah. Our observers have reported that it is not well defended, and beyond a few minor airfields and a few isolated army installations, it is a minor problem in successful attack and defeat of the holding forces. We can accomplish our objective within twenty four hours. Comparatively few ground forces would be necessary, and our air-power is far superior to that of the Earthmen in any event. Once landed, we can command the situation. But can we continue to command it!

This is what we must do: we must land quickly, with a base of operations available for instant use, and we must carry with us on the first wave all the material necessary to carry out the attack, to set up occupation, and to repell all counter-attack. We must, in the initial operation, carry everything with us that any other army could bring up progressively as beachheads were established. We must move thousands of tons of material for each man initially landed, sufficient to keep him almost permanently supplied in his position in the event that we are unable to follow up our conquest due to reverses in other portions of the globe.

To accomplish this, we must make our invading ship our base. Once set down, it must serve as airfield, army headquarters, supply headquarters and must provide even such things as road building equipment and permanent housing. Fortunately, we Martians are well advanced, scientifically, over the Earthmen, and when we land our Space-Flying City in Utah, it will all be over but the shouting, and the dying screams of the enemy!

INVADERS FROM ANOTHER WORLD

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